CAPTAIN SAZARAC

CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

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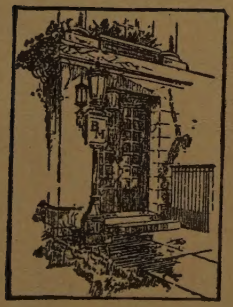
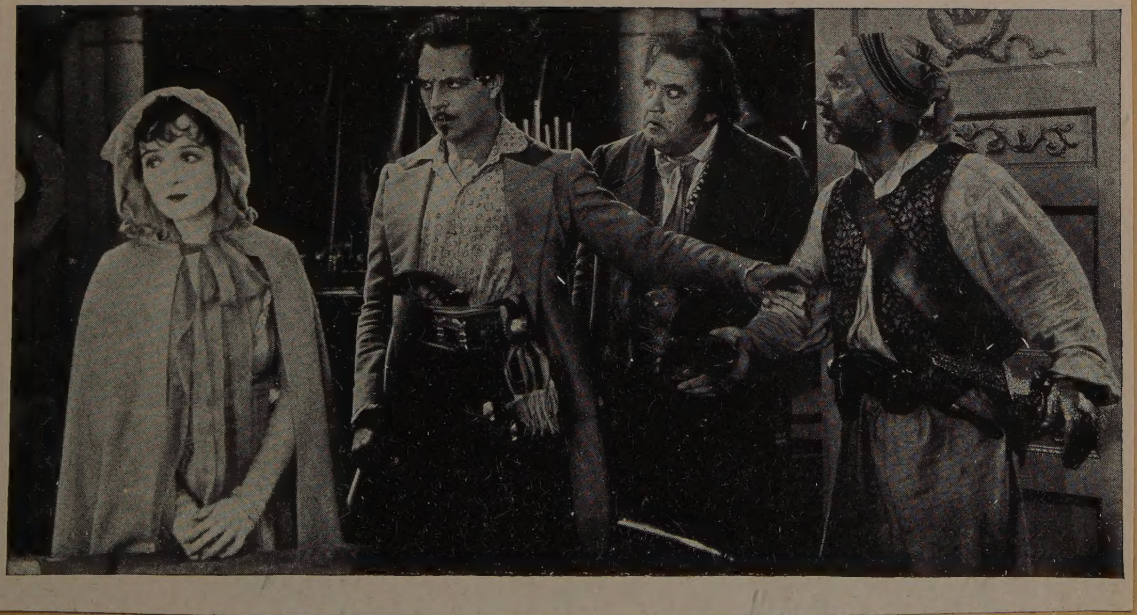
CAPTAIN SAZARAC





A Paramount Picture. *Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea*

THE SURRENDER OF PROUD LOUISE.

CAPTAIN SAZARAC

BY

CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

PHOTOPLAY TITLE

THE EAGLE OF THE SEA

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

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To

CARLOTTA OF OLD NEW ORLEANS

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CAPTAIN SAZARAC

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CHAPTER I

IF JEAN WERE HERE

THE affair was one in which, to this point, the young Count de Almonaster had taken the slightest interest. But now the name of his aunt, the Baroness Pontalba, was upon the lips of the portly alderman of Old New Orleans; and when, in turn, Beluche, the swarthy admiral of the Cartagenian privateers, adverted to her, the languid aristocrat shook with laughter.

"Ho, Monsieur Dominique! You, the fat and prosperous councilor of the American Quarter who, they say, finds the city's politics even better picking than were your days of piracy with Jean Lafitte—you, you, then, it was, who enticed my good aunt to giving ten thousand of the new Yankee dollars to build

the house in which Napoleon is to spend his last days on the rue Chartres! And you—Beluche—for whom, even to-day, any flag will serve! A grand scheme, this, to rescue Bonaparte from the English! What next for us fantastic Creoles?"

"Monsieur! Not so loud, I beg! An affair of state, this, and half the gentry of Louisiana is in it. But the new American governor—eh, *bien!* At Washington, where the English are now so well received, it might be embarrassing—this plot—"

But De Almonaster shouted the louder. The admiral of Cartagena spluttered; the honest councilor rubbed his velvet-clad paunch and pleaded for silence. The young man's glance went from the two one-time buccaneers out the door of Maspero's Exchange to the shining new plaster and green shutters of the House Napoleon; his hand went to the black silk stock at his neck to check further amusement.

"A plot, old scalawags! By St. Louis—a plot! Oh, la! On that gallery the man who played the devil's bowls with the thrones of all Europe is to sit and mull over the affairs of the *Vieux Carre!* This degenerate town,

already with the manners of an American frontier and the brawls of a West India colony! Eh, the emperor! And once we rescue him from St. Helena, who shall entertain him, pray? Ah, my good aunt,—she shall waddle in from her gold-front chaise with its outriders and postilion to say, 'Good Sir,' or 'Excellency,' or 'Your Majesty'—or whatever our eager pot-house cavaliers may determine is proper—she shall curtsey and say: 'Make yourself at home—I have fifty thousand francs invested to make you feel at ease!' "

Beluche—short, dark, restlessly glancing about, his black eyes narrowing as if he would be done with talk and to sea again—growled surlily. Admiral of the New Granada rebels he might be, but to his old cronies of the coffee-houses he was still the Baratarian gunner who fought the pirates' battery on the right of Jackson's line at Chalmette against the British; and he made as wry a face as any of Lafitte's lieutenants when the grateful young Republic of the North pardoned the buccaneers *en masse*.

But the worthy Alderman Dominique sighed at the younger man's jeers.

"We had thought, Monsieur, that—being of what is conceded to be the proudest family of Louisiana—you would lend generously to the plot—"

"Plot?" Again the Count Raoul mocked as he looked across the cobbles at the fresh paint upon the huge wooden shutters of the House Napoleon; he flung his jeweled fingers airily back to the shadowy tap-room: "Ho, fellow! The rum and limes! Be on with them, but tread softly—we have a plot!"

The two old adventurers gazed at the slender figure in some consternation. "Plot!" De Almonaster made the rafters ring with it: "Threescore carpenters, plasterers and what-not, slaves and free men of color—labor all summer at this royal domicile; the very fig sellers of the Place d'Armes mewl away about it to sailormen of every sea—I, myself, across the Caribbean, or at Port Royal, am questioned as to what the bravos of New Orleans mean by this madness; and when I come home I am enticed to a public house, and whispered to of a—plot!"

"Eh, *bien!* It is a plot—" Old Dominique rubbed his nose. "We have the money, the ship, the spirit, the—well, everything."

"Except the emperor! Bonaparte, cooped up on his isle with England watching! Pray, good sirs,—who will bell the cat?"

The admiral shrugged and tasted his limed rum of Barbadoes. The young De Almonaster heard two dolorous sighs. It was, indeed, a quiet life and a shameful pass when two worthy buccaneers of but a decade agone sat at their drink to be gibed by an incredulous aristocrat.

"Eh, well—" mumbled old Dominique absently. "If Jean were here he would go rescue Napoleon for these Creoles. Ho, old cutthroat, if the Captain Lafitte walked these streets again there would be an end to chatter! Eh, the old days! The good wine and the plunder down the Barataria passes! And I—name of God!—am now the alderman for the American Quarter!"

"The Americans," retorted De Almonaster soberly, "are taking all the Faubourg St. Marie. The flatboat Kentuckies are now squatting in shanties all along the old city walls. And, my friends, the trade is going there! The new steamboats down-river are a veritable swarm along the old Tchoupitoulas Road where, as a boy, riding to school, I saw

nothing but the Indians weaving baskets. The *Terre Commune* outside the moat; the Calle de Almazen, where the Spaniards had their warehouses—look what the Yankees are doing! They are building another New Orleans, and political power follows trade. La Belle New Orleans of Carondelet and the viceroys, is passing as a dream, while our thriftless gallants amuse themselves with this latest fancy—building a refuge for the fallen emperor of the French!"

"The town was never more prosperous," protested the alderman. "See what the steamboats have done since they came five years ago! The revenues are excellent since—"

And again the young man shouted his amusement: "Since you, my friend, took the president's pardon and forsook plundering the seas for a seat in the council! Dominique—once Jean Lafitte's lieutenant on the *Black Petral*—mulling over tax budgets and street contracts!"

"But last year, Monsieur," blustered Dominique, "I entertained at dinner the General Jackson himself. His only visit here since

Captain Jean and Beluche and I fought with him against the British. That ought to show you how we stand, eh? Captain Jean, it may be, found the rôle of a pardoned privateer a trifle irksome; or he may have been sent to the bottom of the gulf, as some say, when the Spaniards took his fort on Galveston Bay."

The grim admiral of Cartagena growled and thrust back his long black hair. "That, I do not believe. Our captain was not such a ninny—he who outfought, outsailed, outlaughed them all about the Indies. The English sank his sloop, it is true, but Jean did not wait to be cooped up between them and the king o' Spain's men ashore. You can lay to that, sirs!"

"You should know," grunted Dominique. "If he lives you should get a word o' him about the old haunts—and nothing comes—nothing."

"It is a quiet life at sea," Beluche shrugged. "Even the slave trade languishes. Captain Disto, I hear, lost his last cargo o' blacks, drowned off Dauphin Island rather than have them taken. And in Washington—what? The

politicos talk, while good ships rot at their moorings! The world has become a tame house-dog with not a flea to scratch its hide. Old days are done I fear, Monsieur Dominique."

The young Almonaster mused over his lime and rum. "There is the West," he began slowly. "Down the Mississippi come now the flatboat men with their pelts to trade and to brawl month-long in the brothels among the river willows. It is curious the numbers who have arrived of late. Canadians, trappers, *voyageurs*, rivermen—and they do not return, neither do they lack goods. And gossip comes from Kentucky of some seditious matter again; quarrels of politicians; threats that a new republic might still arise in the West such as, but a few years since, brought Aaron Burr to the Mississippi territories. Already river adventurers have gone from our peaceful Louisiana parishes into the Sabine settlements and come to brawling with the Spaniards. I have it, gentlemen, that the new American governor is warned that any trouble in the West might revive again the old claims of Spain and England; for whatever treaties

were signed at Ghent the monarchists of Europe never had a stomach for Bonaparte's cession of Louisiana to the Americans."

The raven-haired admiral of Cartagena drained his rum. "Name of the devil! What have we to do with Washington, England, or Spain? The admiralties ruined our fortunes o' the seas! And what has the town come to since the privateering trade fell with Lafitte's last stronghold?"

He uprose in his resplendent blue and gold shore clothes, his hard fist to his saber hilt: and, with some difficulty, adjusted his vast cockade hat. De Almonaster smiled aside. The worthy alderman sighed. Beluche, once of the *Black Petral,* togged out in this respectable splendor of the puny republic across the Caribbean!

"Admiral—" old Dominique winked. "And were I a Spanishman out of the Mexicoes with bullion under the hatches, I would turn tail from this admiral and flee as from the devil. His virtue is too recent!"

"Bah!" fumed the admiral. "And were I a customs officer, and came on a bale of smuggled silk down Barataria I would follow

a trail that might lead—who knows?—not so far from the city council chamber?"

The alderman slapped his contented and rotund belly. "Eh, well, old blusterer! You and I—it is not so long since Lafitte's men swaggered these streets with fists of gold and none durst molest them. I can remember how the haughty Creole belles flouted our captain at the mayor's ball, and their families' fortunes were built upon his sea venturing!"

The young De Almonaster listened indifferently. A slim-faced, olive-cheeked youth with straight black eyebrows and a thin line of a mustache—already with his three duellos behind him; and but this year returned from his *voyage de rigueur* to Paris, which every gallant of his day must make to come home with the court polish and gossip that completed his education—the count had spent his recent months on his plantations in St. James and took little heed of the frivolities of the fashionables in La Nouvelle Orleans.

And the two pardoned and punctilious buccaneers of a decade agone but amused him. The plot Napoleon—the new, green-shuttered house across the rue Chartres from Mas-

pero's; the black, trim, Yankee clipper lying in the river, purchased and outfitted by the ardent blades of the city for this wild intrigue to rescue the fallen emperor—also amused him. But now he leaned across the board and spoke seriously:

"I, too, have a memory of Jean Lafitte. I was a lad when General Jackson came back from the victory at Chalmette. Old 'Toinette and my grand-aunt took me to the cathedral when the general made his entry from the Place d'Armes with the beauties of New Orleans casting their wreaths before the great American soldier they had ridiculed but a week agone. I escaped the dames and was wriggling through the throngs to see the ceremony. A tall man in white leather breeches stood in my way—I kicked and pummeled him, bawling that I must see the great American general. He looked down—a fair-skinned man with dark eyes, and the trace of a dandy about him. He inquired, and then hoisted me to his shoulder. And at that, up bustled 'Toinette to snatch me away in horror. I kept staring at my tall man, and back in the Plaza, 'Toinette gasped: 'Be still! That pirate had you! Captain Lafitte of Barataria!'"

"Eh, you were honored, Monsieur!" chuckled old Dominique. "Ah, that day! Beluche, will you remember our fellows running all the way from Fort St. John, dragging the twenty-four-pounders o' Bat'ry Three? Eh, old robber?"

"Aye—a pirate? They did not call Jean so that day! Who was there, as this young man says, so dignified, so much the gentleman and scholar as our captain—a pirate, still unpardoned? Who saved the city from the British but the six hundred scoundrels he led up from Grand Terre to work the Yankee guns? Jean—who, but the year before, turned down the king's gold and a royal commission to save this babblers' town!"

"He had the eyes of all the women on him," grumbled old Dominique. "Do you recall the story of the governor's wife and our captain at Monsieur Berthoud's plantation? Jean!—he would go filch this emperor from under every frigate England could muster! Aye—if Jean were here!"

The young fashionable listened amusedly. The shadows lengthened across the cobbles to the pretentious House Napoleon. The dim

front barroom of La Bourse de Maspero was quite deserted, save for a table of provincial planters from the river parishes here and there. But suddenly the drone of voices from the gaming place in the rear was cut off by a slamming door.

A man had staggered out. Tall, uncouth, of disorderly attire, not at all in the fashion, ragged at the sleeves—he stared at them with swollen eyes set in a drink-flushed face. The empty scabbard of a small sword rattled at his muddy boot-tops; his silken-lined cloak and round velvet cap gave him the aspect of a rather solemn and nervous *poseur.*

"Devil take the dice!" He saw the elegant De Almonaster, and came briskly nearer: "Back with me, Raoul—watch! An affair, Raoul, that will call me out to the Oaks sleepy-eyed some morning this week. The stranger, Sazarac, has the English colonel bewitched. A Sazarac!—I wish something more than drink could draw all eyes to me! A pistoling fellow, eh, *bien!*"

John Jarvis thrust his blinking gray eyes nearer: "A rapier bully, Messieurs—such as this Sazarac . . . there's a woman in it without doubt."

The town's first Bohemian of the arts and letters, a graceless scribbler, painter—wastrel of the wine-shops, for all he was the nephew of the great John Wesley in England. He slept, worked and ate in a dirty studio up on the rue Conti, where, unknown as yet to the world, there labored a young assistant who painted backgrounds for Jarvis's portraits, but who was destined for fame when the gamesters and politicians of the New Orleans of 1821 had been long forgotten—Monsieur Audubon, but lately arrived from the Indies.

Jarvis tapped the table for a drink, looking about to see who might pay the score. "Pistols—" he grunted. "I trust this Sazarac wings the Britisher at least, though if he does, I shall see liquor from his veins and not blood. The fellow can drink more than I which is intolerable. It reflects on my reputation. . . . I shall challenge myself if Sazarac does not!"

"They are to fight?" queried De Almonaster languidly.

"They will. I know the course of these affairs. I attend them all, Raoul. I am the

black buzzard who is earliest to roost at the Dueling Oaks and wish them bad luck—all. Three times this month I have crawled from bed at abominable hours for entertainment, and *nom de Dieu!* Nothing but an ear clipped from the Spaniard, Santanya; a shoe full of blood from an Acadian planter—and the last two worthies shook hands and quit. God, what is the town coming to, that I miss my breakfast over such matters?"

The first Bohemian of the *Vieux Carre* rubbed his nose: "Another drink, Monsieur? Wait—we shall go in presently when the affair becomes provocative. This Sazarac has a steady eye, and Colonel Carr is bent upon an insult."

De Almonaster shrugged his distaste: "I was speaking of the new sugar process at Monsieur Bore's—"

"Oh, no!" returned Jarvis airily. "You were discussing the plot. Why sit with Dominique, the alderman, and Beluche, the admiral, save upon our nice intrigue? Ho!" he roared suddenly, so that the glasses quivered: "Be discreet! — our plot Napoleon!"

The two former buccaneers looked wryly at him. "The devil take you, Jarvis," growled Beluche. "It was of old days, and our vanished captain. You, yourself, whom Jean rescued from perdition once—"

"The plot!" shouted Jarvis so loudly that even bystanders across the cobbled way looked into the shadowy portals of Maspero's. "Ah, I am going to my studio, gentlemen! I have an idea! My new assistant is very clever at painting birds—Monsieur Audubon is crazy to paint birds! He sprinkles salt on their tails to catch them. Now I shall take our plot to the studio, and Monsieur Audubon shall paint salt upon it to catch the Emperor Napoleon."

The two worthies glowered upon him. De Almonaster's idle laugh rang out. He, too, arose with Jarvis, and the latter could not resist a last gibe at his cronies. "The alderman and the admiral—and in the one picture that I cared about, done down at Lafitte's red fort before the Americans plundered it, I had the bad taste to paint them in with my captain! What a downfall!—from piracy to politics for Dominique; and old Beluche blustering about having a lawful commis-

sion!" He put an unsteady finger on the laughing De Almonaster's sleeve: "Come on, Raoul! There is no more romance since Lafitte abandoned the town to the steamboat Yankees; and yet, last evening, upon the Esplanade, I saw a woman's face. I—Raoul—unshaven, dirty, idle—looked back at her coach. I, Raoul—hanging to a lamp-post—made her smile!"

Again De Almonaster's light laughter came. He motioned the jester toward the gaming-rooms. "The lady who arrived with the British colonel's party? Of course—I am told she had the gallants astir when she drove."

Jarvis nodded absently: "They are wishing no bad luck to Colonel Carr beyond that this Sazarac shoots him to-morrow at the Oaks. Eh, well—come!"

From the door they could see the throng in La Bourse de Maspero. There, each morning, among the idling *jeunesse dorée,* came also the leaders of the city's commerce and planters of the parishes; and still, to be "in trade" fit ill upon the Creole gentry—dealing in goods was a plebeian affair to be left to the Yankees and rivermen. The old planters sat

apart to sip their *eau sucrée* and drowse over their dominoes; but at a smaller alcove was the table that drew the younger bloods as by a magnet. The latest gossip of Europe—only twenty-five days out from Boulogne; the affairs of the restored Bourbon Court as reported in the *Courier de la Louisiane,*— were left to the provincials; and the wide door of the small room was packed with silent attentive youths.

Jarvis twitched the coat of the nearest. "What has happened, De Marigny? Is the devil still dicing as to which to take?"

"Carr loses steadily." Young Marigny had but recently attained fame by naming a street of the Faubourg Marigny—his patrimony now being cut into lots and sold to the insatiable Americans outside the city walls—"Rue de Bagatelle," to commemorate his losses at the game. He therefore parted the skirts of his bottle-green coat, thrust his hands upon his breeches of snow-white leather and tapped them significantly: "A ruined man. Eh, *bien!* The British consul, Langhorne, protested, seemingly very uncomfortable at Colonel Carr's insistance at play with this Captain Sazarac, who, it is said, is a mere

professional gambler of the river packets with the manners of a gentleman. I will say he has acted so—he tried in every way to avoid Carr's game, but it appears that the British officer involved himself badly on the way from St. Louis."

"How then?" ventured De Almonaster. "A professional gamester at Maspero's?"

"Carr, himself, introduced the fellow; the game must continue," young De Marigny shrugged; "and there is talk of some affair of women between the two!"

"The lady who looked back from her coach—" mused Jarvis to himself. "I must get me a new waistcoat."

A massive silver candelabrum cast a ruby light upon the cloth about which sat a quartette. Langhorne, His Majesty's Consul; a dealer of Maspero's; Colonel Carr of the newly arrived British Mission en route to the Mexicoes; and the stranger from the West.

"Sazarac—" muttered De Marigny, "whose fame at the cards has overleaped the town in one night. Mark him, Raoul!—a peruke, whitened as silver! Where has the fellow been these years as to know not the fashions?"

The stranger's face was all but averted.

The profile gave the impression of utter obliviousness to the crowded room. His English small-clothes were, indeed, rather passé for the period; and the powdered hair above a coat of blue broadcloth, his buff breeches, and silk stockings thrust into low silver-buckled shoes gave a quaint distinction to his tall figure. The two young men watched his bronzed hand turning a card under the ruby light. After a moment Jarvis yawned audibly; and then a nudge came between him and the Count de Almonaster. They looked down upon the short stout form of Dominique, the alderman. Behind him peered Beluche, the restless seaman of Cartagena.

"Lend them your legs, Monsieur Raoul," commented Jarvis: "They have sat on their plot so long they are decrepit."

The artist strolled again to the barroom. Not even the buzz of interest that followed a violent exclamation in the card-room lured him again from his cognac. But Dominique, the alderman, had started to his tiptoes with a curious glance at his fellow-buccaneer. "A voice?" he whispered, and stared past the onlookers.

The British officer, flushed with drink and chagrin, had leaned closer to his opponent. "Do you question my word, sir, as to the worth of the wench? Put her upon the block at the Rotunda to-morrow! She would fetch three thousand dollars at Charleston; and in this town, sir, if you will find a fairer one—slave, or free woman of color—or even among its reputed beauties—"

There was a stir; the Creole gentlemen glanced at one another darkling. Langhorne, the consul, raised his hand, but Sazarac had answered slowly.

"Your pardon, sir. I did not know the—the—she was a chattel. I own no slaves, sir, nor do I care to wager for one."

"You shall play on, sir. You have ruined my fortunes on this river voyage, and in last night's play! I demand my chance at retrieving. You have just accepted my two horses in pledge. Now, then,—this San Domingo girl, upon the card, sir?"

Sazarac gathered the long rough surtout about his shoulders as if to arise. The consul whispered to the red-faced Carr. The dealer sat back with a glance at the circle of faces.

"You can not leave!" Carr cried hoarsely. He turned to those behind him: "Gentlemen! Is it customary, in New Orleans, for a loser to be refused any legitimate wager that may reinstate him?"

There was a murmur; it was the code at Maspero's. The stranger must know. De Marigny whispered: "He has Sazarac there. The stranger must play!"

The stranger glanced about. Carr struck the table violently.

"It is my privilege, gentlemen! A card, sir! The turn of one card, instead of running the deal! No chance, then, for trickery!"

The stillness became acute. It was a bad word at Maspero's. De Marigny expected the next instant to see the unknown gamester fling his glove into Carr's face. But the quiet profile did not change. Langhorne clucked in his throat as if the situation was intolerable—as if, indeed, more portentous things than a slave girl hung on the turn of the card.

"*Heu!*" whispered the fat alderman. "I wish I could see. The insult is coming! We shall all miss our breakfast to-morrow morning!"

"Be still." Raoul's dark eyes winced with a half-pity . . . the stranger had passed the insinuation as if not hearing. The crowd breathed freer, but with covert amazement. The unknown gamester, then, would not fight?

"The card, then—" Sazarac went on slowly. "Three thousand dollars on the red against the bond girl."

"Taken—" Carr bowed. "The black will turn, gentlemen!"

The dealer threw the cards in a semicircle across the cloth. Deliberately, but with a flash of his white fingers, he picked one at random and turned it up.

It was the ace of hearts.

The groups watched it curiously. Captain Sazarac arose, threw his cloak higher about his face, although the day was warm, and turned to go. The dealer, at a gesture from him, swept the notes and gold upon the cloth, into a leather bag. The groups broke up with a comment here and there; the gentlemen by the door gave away to the stranger as he advanced.

Colonel Carr had started sullenly at this

abrupt dismissal by his victorious opponent. Whatever wild word was upon the ruined man's lips was checked by the consul's muttered warning. But Carr, too, arose, following a pace to growl over the crowd at the door.

"The girl, sir, will be at your disposal at the hotel at whatever hour you claim your property!"

The stranger bowed. Out in the drinking-room he seemed like one conscious that the eyes of all New Orleans' men of affairs were upon him. Alone among them, he snapped his fingers for a drink. Quaffing the Madeira he gathered the coat about him and strode to the door. The dandies within watched him against the yellow sunlight on the cobbles. A black hostler shambled forward with the stranger's horse.

But just outside the door he stopped abruptly. In the shadow of the arched courtway of St. Louis Street two squat, short figures, their heads together, their arms gesticulating wildly, were vainly trying each to quiet the other.

"You know it is!" gasped the worthy alder-

man, holding his side. "By the Lord!—I am not fooled—no, no! Shaven as a priest, his hair whited as an English squire's—muffled by stock and peruke—no, nothing deceives these old eyes of mine!"

"Thou damned fool—silence!" whispered the swarthy admiral of Cartagena. "Is there not still a price upon his head—an added price since he renounced the president's pardon, and involved himself in that affair of Galveston Island? Spanish, English—the Americans, too—they would hound him to the gallows!"

The tall cloaked figure was passing. Twenty paces away, the entrance to La Bourse de la Maspero was filled with watching burghers.

And from them all a young man had advanced smilingly. In his full-skirted green coat and shining white breeches held within his polished Hessian boots, the young Count de Almonaster bowed gracefully and extended a hand all but hidden by his beruffled cuff.

"At the green room of Maspero's, sir, none play save those to whom New Orleans extends

its hospitality. If, perchance, at any time, the name of a gentleman could serve in a possible affair, I am the grandson of Don Almonaster y Roxas."

"I thank you, Monsieur." The stranger extended his own. "I am Captain Gaspar Sazarac, recently on service with the United States explorations in the West." He shrugged smilingly: "I thank you, Monsieur."

He turned and met again two elderly men who stared unbelievingly. Then the gold-laced admiral of Cartagena placed hand upon his saddle.

"Behold us!" he whispered. "I—Beluche—and this, old Dominique! Dogs of old days and green seas! And you—the Captain Jean!"

The stranger turned his horse lightly. "It may be," he mused, "that, after the heat is done, I shall take the air upon the levee by the old Fort St. Louis. The gentry do not promenade just there, I believe."

Before the eyes of the watching burghers at the coffee-house he cantered down the cobbles of the rue Chartres. The fat and honest alderman muttered; and then, at a laugh from

the young count, he turned to stare fiercely at him.

"I shall take the air upon the levee, myself, sirs," smiled Raoul. "Ho, Dominique! Do not fail your captain!"

CHAPTER II

A SHIP FOR A PIRATE'S EYE

It was dusk when Raoul de Almonaster sauntered along the moldering brick parapet of the little pentagonal fort that marked the upper river junction of the dismantled city wall with the green-scummed moat built to defend the landward side. The children were playing upon the green, peaceful levee where small, shaggy Creole ponies browsed. Above the fort a line of uncouth flatboats were moored among the willows; but on the city side one caught glimpses of brightly-gowned women taking the air along this fashionable promenade in front of the Place d'Armes. But none near the old Fort St. Louis . . . it was too close to the turbulent flatboat men.

But along the inner levee face De Almonaster presently saw what he had come to see. Dominique, the honorable councilor of the city, and the resplendent admiral of the Re-

public of Cartagena, even now fighting for its life against the king o' Spain's men across the Caribbean Sea. The red-shirted flatboat men responded to Dominique's greetings jovially.

"A worthy politician's rôle—playing mediator between the Kentuckies with their brawls and brothels among the willows, and the Creoles who protest against their encroachments upon the ancient city promenade." Raoul smiled. "Buccaneer though he was, he yet may be mayor!"

The small carronade which marked the hour of retreat—eight o'clock—barked at the city hall. At once, slaves and children, soldiers and sailors, must be off the streets of the *Vieux Carre.* The lazy boom of a warship down the crescent bend of the Mississippi answered; and, following the sound idly, the count's eye noted, before the Plaza, a long, black, rakish clipper with shining yellow masts, new sails glistening as they hung to dry, and untenanted decks, sweet and clean as a ballroom floor.

"A beauty, that *Seraphine!*" he mused. "The latest Yankee, out from Boston, can not

match her. Ho, Beluche! She must make old blood stir in you two adventurers! Aye, turn your envious eyes aside!"

He started at a step on the levee. The gamester of the Bourse de la Maspero had come along the dismantled rampart of the fort. Sazarac bowed with a recognizing smile. The bronzed cheeks looked even darker below the whited wig; his eyes had the level, thoughtful humor of the man who laughs behind unreadable reserve.

"You may well say, Monsieur de Almonaster. I have not seen in years a hull so cleanly lined."

De Almonaster glanced at the hand upon the silver sword hilt. The two rotund respectables had seen the tall man in buff and broadcloth, and were hastening. "I see, Monsieur," retorted he, "that, despite your services with the American explorations in the West, you know a ship?"

"I have seen the sea, Monsieur." Sazarac bowed with a searching glance at the younger man. "And you—an eye for a ship is an eye for a woman. . . . I did not expect to meet the Count de Almonaster so far from the fashionable promenade?"

"Nor I to find Captain Lafitte so near again to the Place d'Armes!"

Sazarac studied him gravely: "Your pardon, sir! I think—"

Raoul snapped his fingers laughingly at old Dominique puffing up the levee. Admiral Beluche had drawn a cutlass in fervent salute to his captain.

"Come—come, gentlemen!" Sazarac's voice raised sharply.

"Thou—Jean!" whispered Dominique in the Acadian *patois* of the coast.

"Lafitte of Barataria. Come, you—sir! Did you think you could tread these streets and not be recognized?" murmured De Almonaster.

The two old adventurers crowded around the stranger. "Now, I am a man again," chuckled Dominique. "And not a clerk drooling over city affairs!" And suddenly, with an affectionate gesture, he lifted slightly the whited peruke above Sazarac's ear. Raven black the hair, tinged with gray. "The beard shaven," droned on old Dominique. "The cutlass scar concealed which you got from the Spaniard at Trinidad! And these arms caught you as you fell!"

"And this cut the fellow down!" cried Beluche. "Jean, cease this fooling!"

The Captain Sazarac was laughing in turn. His old lieutenants seized his hands, stroked his sleeve, crying out brokenly. And then De Almonaster, forgotten by them all, raised a warning hand. The city lantern man was climbing the post by the fort corner; across one of the innumerable little wooden bridges spanning the moat to the shanty collection which marked the American Quarter came a watchman of the levee warehouses. Sazarac glanced keenly at young Almonaster.

"No fear," mumbled the alderman. "I have heard this young gallant say but yesterday that he would draw sword in any affair if Lafitte was to command!"

"Aye, for the emperor!" growled Beluche. "The clipper, Jean! Did you ever see a finer? Monsieur Girod brought her from Charleston new from the ways! The finest teak—lacquer tables, tapestries smuggled from Bilboa! All for the fallen emperor! Perhaps you have heard, my Captain?"

"We were saying who so worthy to command as Captain Lafitte?" fumed old Dom-

inique, eager as a boy, "did we not, young sir?"

Sazarac smiled. Raoul interposed: "The plot! Ah, yes . . . the plot!"

"They have built a mansion for him in the rue Chartres—" protested Dominique. "Financed the ship—not a first family in all Louisiana that will not have at least a midshipman aboard! But old Bossiere to command—bah! I would balk at it if I had a skin to risk!"

"You might well with the English ring of ships around St. Helena," said Sazarac gravely. "Well, I am Lafitte. I am at your mercy, Monsieur!"

The restless eyes of Beluche were upon a trio of officers from the American garrison who came slowly along the promenade. "Too much talk!" he muttered. "Since that old affair of yours, Jean—the seizure of Galveston Island, despite the president's pardon, you have long been proscribed. As to this emperor—the devil with him! The *Seraphine*—look at her now! Is she a toy for the dandies of this town to play with? A ship—Jean, and a good ship?"

"Eh?" put in Alderman Dominique: "Robber, what's in your mind?"

"The American officers—" retorted the admiral. "Let us be on."

"The Yankees—" murmured Sazarac, throwing his silken neck scarf higher as the meeting groups saluted courteously. "When will Louisiana be done with this idea that she is a principality aloof from the Washington government? The Yankees, gentlemen, are here taking your little Paris."

"They might better have left their manners in the Kentucky woods," said De Almonaster. "And cease meddling in the affairs of Spain across the Sabine. You, yourself, sir—what is the feeling in the West?"

Sazarac stopped to look over the darkening river. "It is a far road to Washington. In the Ohios there is gossip. A new republic to be carved from the wilderness, the Spanish provinces to be seized; and among the discontented spirits are the exiled Tories from the Canadas and the agents of His British Majesty ever watching with jealous eyes. You saw, sir, the affair of yesterday at Maspero's?"

"Colonel Carr, who came with you down-

river? I can not make his mission out as I might wish."

"Nor I. Now and then, on the packet, he boasted of curious things. I recall, one night, a lady warned him to silence!"

"The lady?" De Almonaster smiled. "I have not seen her, but there was a buzz when she appeared among us. Of an illustrious Tory family, we are told, that fled from New York to Canada after the old revolution. You should know, sir!"

"There were two women—" said Sazarac slowly. "The man took care I was not introduced. I think he assured them I was a common gambler. That, sir, is why I took his measure at the cards—that he put his women to despise me. I am sorry that he forced his game upon me to his own ruin."

"The slave girl!" chuckled Dominique. "They say his lady's maid. I warrant she berated the colonel over his losing the servant to you!"

"A woman on a card—" rumbled Beluche. "It made me think of old days at Grand Terre —women against gold . . . and the traffic and the rum—e-oh!"

The stranger was watching young De Almonaster sharply. "You are curiously constrained, sir?"

"It is nothing—" Raoul laughed shortly.

"Tell me what was on your lips the moment before!"

"Oh, nothing! The coffee-houses must have their scandal!"

"What then, sir? I have sensed some jest among the tavern drinkers?"

The count shrugged. The two old buccaneers stirred uneasily. They had heard that tone, the tigerish awakening of the master, in days of blood and splintering decks.

"Monsieur," went on Sazarac, as if coming from a mood he wished to put away, "my game was fair. As for this wench, I did not want her. Nor shall I claim her now. The colonel's lady need not fear for her yellow maid."

"In very truth—" blurted De Almonaster. "That is why they laugh! If the gossip is true, Carr's act was that of a poltroon!"

"What is the gossip? That I dare not claim this wager?"

He was upon the young man now, his lu-

minous eyes narrowing fiercely, the line deepening upon his lean bronzed cheeks. Raoul tried to evade him. "Come! They laugh—at what?"

"The tale, sir, runs about the coffee-houses —but I do not, for a moment, credit it—that, on the river trip, Colonel Carr noticed that your eye was taken by his wife's companion. The latest beauty of our Esplanade! And—the story, sir, is that—as a jest, he wagered her against your gold, knowing well—"

The young man broke off as if ashamed to voice the rest.

"Go on!" thundered Sazarac. "You shall prove the word! I win at a toss an unknown chattel! The jest is that I dare not claim the lady's maid!"

"That is not the point, Monsieur. The lady had no maid. The girl in Carr's mind was the one who took your eye upon the packet. Free, white—equal to his wife in station—"

He was silenced by the tense breathing of the older man. Then Sazarac stood quietly back. The two buccaneers were silent at his mood.

"Carr would roar with laughter if you so much as mentioned the debt. Of course he did not dream it would come to the lady's ears —that would be infamy beyond conception. An evil jest of a drunken fool. But, doubtless," added Raoul apologetically, "there is no truth to the gossip."

The captain was gazing at the stars above the river. Old Dominique rubbed his velvet waistcoat. Beluche fingered his sword of Cartagena.

Sazarac at length spoke absently: "About the wine-shops they spread the jest?"

"Ah," murmured De Almonaster, "if the story is true!"

"The scoundrel deserves not a challenge, but a lashing from here to the German Coast levee," grunted Dominique; "but no, it is impossible. Go claim your black-faced wench, my Captain. The colonel's wife may give you a tongue-lashing, but think how she will scotch him!"

"The wench can lacky around the emperor's suite when we sail—" grinned Beluche sourly. "For I am of a mind that Jean is to command!"

"What nonsense, old dog! I—in such madness!" The captain stared past the schooner's ghostly sails against the stars . . . the Count de Almonaster alone, seemed to guess his thoughts and he was silent.

"The *Seraphine*—" growled Beluche again. "A prettier sight for a seaman's eyes never the sun shone on! Fast—unknown in all the ports, gunned to battle the best of them! Ho, Dominique!—think of her slipped free on the heels of the traffic! Name o' God—the fat house-cat ships afloat these days when the last black flag has vanished!"

"Ah, me!" sighed the honest councilor. "It was but last October that we hanged three buccaneers in the Plaza—taken off the *Belize*. I went to the country the day that the three good lads danced on air. It was sad—I drooled three hours over my luncheon. Old days are not so far . . . why, but fifteen years agone we were at the Red House on Grand Terre! But fifteen—and none durst lay a ship in past the guns of our fort, or claim customs on a bale of silks we offered the city! Ah, me—and I am fat—an honest alderman!"

The two old fellows turned to the lost leader. The admiral of Cartagena plucked his sleeve. "A ship—and you can not linger forever, disguised, in this dull town . . . and I have letters of marque from Colombia as well!"

Sazarac was not listening. Now he turned to De Almonaster as the one who delicately read his thoughts.

"You will challenge, of course—for the lady's sake—" said Raoul.

"To-night, I shall claim my wager from Colonel Carr," answered Sazarac quietly. "Bond girl or free, I will go knock at the gates of hell for her—and we shall see who, of the town, laughs loudest!"

"I recall you won on the ace of hearts," sighed Dominique. "Sazarac wins the lady of the jesting. But Sazarac! . . . *Nom de Dieu!* What shall they say Jean Lafitte had to do with Sazarac's winning? The American governor would build another scaffold in the Place d'Armes!"

"Out of all the deep swamp from Spanish Gap to the Teche you would see old cutthroats pouring to wreck it about his ears—" grunted

Beluche. "Black or white, let him seize his winning! Ho, this Sazarac! A good ship, and Sazarac! The wide sea, and Sazarac! Dominique—ho, robber—listen!"

"Be still!" muttered the alderman. "See that policeman by the city lamp? Tut, tut—this will not do—this howling!"

CHAPTER III

THE WAGER IS CLAIMED

THE shimmer of a young moon lay in the wide stone arch of the Hotel Orleans on the rue Chartres when, with the abrupt stride and bearing of a soldier, Captain Gaspar Sazarac, late of the American Explorations, turned within it. The monotonous cry of the city guard calling the hour and the state of the weather, for the old Spanish custom was still extant, came to his ears. The guard himself, under his cocked hat, formidable in his blue frock-coat with broad breast-straps of black leather, had lifted his short sword respectfully as the stranger passed the portals. It was late; the stone-paved court, the winding staircase, lit by wax myrtle candles, leading to the galleried rooms, all were in shadow. A little stream of water, led into the city by cypress log conduits, flowed past the porter's bench. The old *concierge* arose to greet the cloaked figure.

"Fellow, you will say to the British officer, Colonel Carr, that Captain Sazarac is at his pleasure."

"Oui, M'sieu!"

The old free man of color hobbled up the dim stairs. The moonlight bathed the middle of the court where was a formal group of pomegranates, dwarf figs and palms, near which stood the huge, yellow Spanish jar which, each day, the city carriers filled with the drinking water. The visitor stood in the shadows absorbed in the peace of this quiet spot. The rooms above, facing the court from the galleries, showed hardly a light. From the slaves' quarters in the rear came a soft murmur of voices not unpleasing.

But as Sazarac waited, with the odor of the jasmined walls and pillars coming to his nostrils, he was conscious that some one had stirred across the parterre. The figure of a woman had stepped from the shade to glance up at the old black shambling along the third upper gallery, his ring of rusty keys creaking at his belt.

"Que e la?"

The white-gowned figure started, turning to

glance out the arched entrance. The stranger bowed, lifting his hat. He could see her figure grow rigid in the moonlight, her stare became a thing to turn an intruder to stone. At once he knew her—and she him. Sazarac, the unattached and unintroduced gambler of the packet, *Marie Louise*. The stranger heard her quick indrawing of breath as she looked away, toying with her ivory fan. The silence became intolerable. The shuffle of the *concierge's* bare feet died away.

"Your pardon, Mademoiselle, for the intrusion. It was by appointment that I came—indefinite, it is true, but at Colonel Carr's request. You are—pardon me—of his family?"

"I am Miss Lestron—the ward of Colonel Carr of Quebec."

He bowed again. He had feared . . . on the packet he had mordantly not taken the trouble to ascertain which was the wife of the English officer. But now, there came some surge of feeling he could not explain. He had been stung to folly, that was it—conscious of no other desire, to-night, save to confront Carr, fling an insult at him that no man might

endure; challenge and kill him under the oaks of the Bayou St. John road. And now he was gazing on the fairest face that all his adventuring life had shown him. Perfect in the moonlight, the dark eyes cold, scornful; the shrug of her white shoulders above the lace corsage—apparently Miss Lestron had been going to the opera of the Theater d'Orleans where, he recalled, Rose De Vries appeared to-night in *Le Prophete*. But the hour was late for this.

"I think, sir—you can not see him. It happens—" She glanced up warily at the silent galleries where the *concierge* was mumbling away ineffectually on his return. "Colonel Carr will not receive any one to-night."

She turned half from him with an air of dismissal. The stranger bowed once more. His heart was beating with a curious relief. It was plain that the girl did not know of the infamous jest with which all the coffee-houses were ringing. He knew now he would pocket the insult; a duel was impossible, for it would drag her name deeper into the mire. Carr had guessed aright; Sazarac could not claim his wager. In a private drinking bout Carr

might roar with laughter at the gambler's dilemma; but, for the lady's sake, Sazarac would not challenge; nor would he permit talk of the affair to go about.

He drew his light cloak closer as he turned to go. The girl was lost in the pomegranate shade; the square galleried court of the *pension* was still, the heavy shuttered apartments emptied; for every fashionable had gone long since to the new opera ambitiously opened—late as the season was—on the rue Orleans in the Doric Hall next door to John Davis' and Monsieur Boudousquie's gaming-house. But as he reached the areaway with its drowsy tinkle of flowing water, he started at a cry that rang wildly through the courtyard, the scream of a negro, and a vengeful shout above.

Turning, he saw the girl in the court staring upward. Then her arms were flung out in appeal. And again that choked cry of a woman, but not in fear—imperious, determined:

"Have done beating the girl! What?—and you strike me!"

Leaping back to stare up, the visitor saw a

A Paramount Picture. *Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea.*

"YES, I AM JEAN LAFITTE, THE NOTORIOUS PIRATE WHOM YOU HATE."

woman crushed out over the iron lattice rail. The moonlight struck the epauletted shoulder of Colonel Carr, who seemed bent on hurling her to the courtyard. The girl below cried out again hotly. And with a mutter Sazarac sprang past her, up the curving staircase until he gained the third gallery.

The wife of the British colonel was choked and helpless against the railing as the stranger reached them. His hand was upon his sword, but with the other powerful arm he caught the man squarely by the collar, tore him away, flung him headlong against the wall—and then stood quietly, the gilded insignia of His Majesty's Service in his hand. Glancing at the epaulette he hurled it to the court below. Miss Lestron had followed past the cowering serving-girl bleeding on the staircase.

"Madame—" she cried sharply, "are you hurt?"

"But for this gentleman, I had died," the wife gasped, and then checked it with new scorn. Madame Carr stopped abruptly, her eyes upon the unknown gambler of the river packet.

"This," began the girl quietly, "is Captain

Sazarac of the American Service. We—must thank you, sir, even for this regrettable aid. You perceive the affair, without doubt—a private matter, of which we entreat—as you are a—gentleman—"

She had hesitated, her dark eyes on him, her lip quivering in the moonlight. A shuffle on the gallery floor; the drunken man was getting unsteadily to his feet. He reeled, grasped the railing, cleared his dazed eyes, and stared.

"Sazarac—bah! Come then, Sazarac, the gambler! Eh—" he lurched forward, and held himself up. "Ho, the porter!—have this fellow thrown out who dares invade my privacy!"

"Lionel!" The wife muttered, and then was still.

Monsieur Sazarac bowed to her quietly.

"What I have done, Madame—I am answerable for. The matter explains itself, doubtless. It shall not pass my lips."

"Sazarac—ruined me," panted the colonel. "A trickster fellow—a sharper of the packet trade—eh, get you within your rooms, Madame!"

"You precede me, sir," she retorted steadily, "you are in no condition to converse."

"Converse? Eh—Sazarac, here? I remember—" he lurched to the rail with hoarse laughter. "An appointment, eh—Captain Sazarac?"

"The matter is settled," commented the other quietly. "You will permit me to depart."

He was passing when the disheveled officer staggered to the narrow space between rail and wall. "He has come, my—dear, to—ha, ha!—perchance, to claim his wager!"

"Sir, you will permit me to pass."

"Not so soon, sir—Captain Sazarac—whoever you are. Ha-ha—it was a stroke—a *coup*—you will admit that, even if I lost, eh?"

Red-faced, leering, he stumbled nearer, laughing loudly.

" 'Pon word, fellow, you had the effrontery to show up, then?"

Something in the cold eyes of the taller man stung through to his drunken brain. "I will not fight you, eh? Is that what you are thinking? Of course not—of course not, Captain Sazarac! I—of His Majesty's Service,

and you—not a gentleman in the city could vouch for you!"

"Colonel Carr," put in the girl steadily, "will you cease?" She stepped nearer: "The gentleman but wishes to depart. The house will be aroused, the servants are gabbling now!"

"You will excuse him, sir." Madame Carr turned to the stranger; and even in her disarray, he saw that she was matronly beautiful, but hollow-eyed as one torn by ceaseless anxiety: "He does not know of what he speaks."

"I can speak that, Madame, that would put all Louisiana in an uproar. Langhorne, the consul, will open his eyes when—when—"

With a sudden furious movement Mrs. Carr closed his mouth. He threw her off violently. "Cease this, Madame! I am not a child, or fool! Already about this crack-brained city the clouds are gathering! From the Sabine country the Spaniards—"

"Be still!" She checked him with rising fury. In the moonlight her eyes held the glitter of a tigress. But the officer's drunken madness became uncontrollable.

"To your rooms, you women! Both of you! As for this man—" he turned again, staring abruptly at the tall cloaked figure; for the time, he had forgotten him: "Bah! He is here because—"

"We know," put in the elder woman coldly, "he has ruined you at the cards—everything. The consul has informed me of this humiliation beyond words."

Carr was laughing evilly again. "Eh, well! The pot-house gallants saw it all. Oh, ho!—there were wagers that Captain Sazarac would not even dare lift his face again at the gaming-houses. He would find pretexts, he would invent reasons—indeed it was a shabby trick to put upon—even a packet gambler!"

There was a silence. Madame Carr was staring at the stranger.

"What is this, sir? I heard of some silly story of the card-rooms—Madame Des Trehan would not explain, but there was comment, upon the promenade, to-day. Sir, as my husband but shouts, laughing, will you enlighten us?"

Monsieur Sazarac stood with folded arms. The girl in white was watching him doubt-

fully. Suddenly she came nearer. There was almost pleading in her softness.

"Tell me. There was some cruel jest put upon you, sir?"

The stranger would not answer. Carr laughed hoarsely, lurching against the rail.

"The jest is this, ladies! Upon the packet trip, this man was all eyes for one of you. Chagrined that I would not introduce him, he was bent upon breaking me at the cards. He had the luck of a cold devil even to the last throw at Maspero's. Eh, well, it was but a jest! The town chuckles over it. I wagered him—against his winnings of the packet, a bond girl of our household. He took it greedily—ha-ha!"

"Sir, we traveled with no servant save the public help," the wife put in.

"That is true," Carr straightened up with drunken gravity. "But he took the wager. He thought, evilly enough, there was a wench of San Domingo—fair as one of you. He was imbecile enough to yearn for her glances!"

"Your word, sir, if you recall?" said Sazarac gravely.

"A jest! Who would deem it but a card-room jest!"

The stranger turned as if to escape from an unpleasing situation. But the elder woman suddenly came between them. "But what is this curious thing they whisper of along the promenade? I caught a laugh, a pitying look!"

She swept scornfully upon her husband. "Did you, then, cheat at the cards?"

Carr roared his mirth: "No—on my honor! There was no need!"

"The affair is done," murmured the stranger. "Your pardon, Madame!"

But as he made to pass, Carr must gibe once more at him. "Your wager, sir? The prize you claim—which was it?"

The silence grew acute. The two women stared unbelievingly; the younger turned widening eyes upon the silent stranger.

"He told you—that?"

"Nothing, Mademoiselle. Allow me to depart!"

"He meant me! A girl of San Domingo! Bandied my name in the card-rooms—"

"You were not mentioned, Mademoiselle. I never knew your name before. You will allow me to go, Mademoiselle Lestron. It is enough—"

"It is not enough! You do not know all, sir!" She turned swiftly to the drunken colonel and struck him sharply in the face. "You dared this! You infamous coward! I—a slave of San Domingo—"

Carr stood in an abject sobering. "Louise, this is folly!"

"I shall speak! Whom could you mean?"

"Eh? A jest! I said, a jest—not meant for any one's ears but his and mine! He had the impudence to come here—to claim—something—" Carr settled back on the rail uncertainly.

"Something?" Miss Lestron turned icily to Sazarac. "Sir, and what?"

"I do not know. I had no thought save to seek Colonel Carr and demand satisfaction. The affair could have been arranged at the Oaks with no breath of the quarrel's point. One of us should die . . . the other's lips sealed in honor. Was that not enough, Mademoiselle, for your protection?"

Sazarac, the river gamester, saw a curious light in her eyes. Gratefulness, scorn, or the brief interest in this idea of protecting her, he could not say which, for she turned at once

to the other man. Her voice flowed on steadily but mounting to a peak of implacable contempt.

"On the turn of a card, sir? You played high—very high . . . an empire, perhaps, risked in a Chartres gambling-house!"

"Will you be still?" blustered Carr, staggering forth. "A jest—I said a jest on him! Your name was not in it! I said a slave girl. Bah,—I will go to Langhorne and borrow a wench to pay my debt, if that is the issue!"

"You had best both be still," warned the older woman frightenedly now. "Louise, come—this is no matter for a card-room brawl. Sazarac—if he is vouched for as a gentleman in this city, must challenge. I suppose—ah, God! He will challenge—" And, passing them with high head but tear-dimmed eyes, Madame Carr went to her chambers.

"Bah," muttered Carr with sudden drunken sleepiness. "Go home, Sazarac! You, to your rooms, Louise! My head aches with all this ranting! It was a jest. On Sazarac, because of his taking my last farthing—on Louise, because of her airs. Enough, it's done. Sazarac can challenge and be damned.

He can send a second—if he knows a gentleman in the city, which is improbable—when I am sober. My affair is in Langhorne's hands. Now, to bed!"

He staggered along the gallery. But suddenly, with a shrug, a bow—a face serene in the moonlight—Captain Sazarac addressed him.

"Sir, I am minded to recall my words. Now, I shall claim my wager!"

"I say—to bed—" mumbled Carr thickly. He reeled at his door, waved a palsied finger at them and crashed against the furniture within.

Miss Lestron stood at the balustrade of the winding staircase as the stranger was descending. A step below he turned:

"I claim my wager. Let them have a care who put a jest upon me in this town! The sea is near . . . and it is wide. Wide, Mademoiselle, and deep; and far—very far, is the way to its secret places."

"I do not understand." She was watching him intently. He had gone to the next turn of the staircase. The moonlight struck the silver of his sword hilt. She leaned forth, and her

eyes struck fire from his own when he glanced up. "Far?" she whispered: "And it may be beautiful!"

He watched her lips. The perfume of the jasmined wall seemed to rise from the court and engage her; she seemed afloat in a purple sea formed by the shadows. A face, a form luminous in the mists of his dark years of remembrance. The soul of his youth was stirring . . . he had dared all, lost all, on decisions quick, hot, pregnant as this, in days long put behind.

"I love you," he said quietly. "You will remember that."

She heard his boot on the stones of the court. He was passing the pomegranate clump when he thought something flashed near him in the moonlight.

A white thing, a light thing—a feather, a petal in the air. But he saw no more, nor heard a sound from above. He went to the untenanted street, wondering if she had waited until his footsteps died away. He wondered why he had spoken; and then he laughed. Sazarac, the packet gamester . . . Jean Lafitte, last of the sea-adventurers—

ghost of a vanished time back to tread the streets where his life was not worth the flicker of a moonbeam in the jasmine screen below her window.

After he had gone, something did stir. A man crawled out from the shadows across the area, went to the gardened center of the court and searched under the fig and pomegranate leaves. Presently he muttered and straightened up, a white blossom in his hand.

"Eh?" he said. "A camellia . . . it has been in her hair. She was to wear it to the opera, and Carr's orgy to-night prevented. I would have seen her pass . . . she would have thought me a red-eyed beggar standing by the areaway, but I would have seen her pass."

John Jarvis stared up at the silent balcony. Then he, too, went his way.

"The *Café la Veau Qui Tête*—" he grumbled. "I shall put on my old waistcoat again to get drunk in. Sazarac! Damn this Sazarac! A flower from her hair, and the fool did not see it! A flower for Sazarac!"

At the *Café la Veau* he entered by the garden gate and went to sit among the huge wine

tuns under the tiled shed. "Three measures of liquor and I could paint a white camellia against her hair," he mused: "but the taproom and I together could not paint love in her eye—for me."

After that he sought a bench and slept. Presently in came another and by the same stealthy passageway. A huge seaman, this, with broad hairy chest, and tattooed arms. He examined the sleeping painter, took off his coat and spread it above him. "He must be kept drunken and asleep," muttered Johanness. "The fool would shout it through the town—the Captain Jean returned, and meeting us old ghosts up from the islands! Enter, Old Slit-Nose! None here save John, the taproom *avocat*. A howl from him and he draws my knife point! Sit quiet and await. Our host gave me the keys and is abed . . . he prefers not to know what he should not know, like any wise man!"

CHAPTER IV

THE OLD SEA-ROVERS AWAKEN

At midnight Captain Sazarac turned from the rue de la Levee to the broad pavement that skirted the Place d'Armes, and, for a moment, contemplated the changes which even the few years of the American occupation had wrought in the Paris of the New World. A painted iron palisade with ornate grill gates enclosed the square before the cathedral which he had known as a dusty parade-ground over which lazily flapped, now one, now the other—the Royal standard of Spain or the fleur-de-lis of France. A portion of the ancient wooden gallows still remained, but about it, now, the children played of mornings, listening to the fearsome tales of Bras Coupe, the terror of the swamps who preyed on human flesh and was proof to musket balls, as the colored nurses had it.

In the narrow way between the cathedral

and the old Spanish *calaboza* the exile paused again. Documents of court and *avocat* were tacked to the wooden doors. Not so many years agone had not he—Jean Lafitte—sent his men up from the pirates' fortified refuge on Grand Terre Island to bribe for the escape of his brother, Pierre, from this same prison? And time and again had they not both laughed to read, on these same boards, the city's proclamation for their capture—the law's futile fury when no man durst lay hand upon them, so completely did the Grand Terre adventurers awe the town?

"How many changes!" mused the wayfarer. "Hailed by the city as a hero, pardoned by the president and acclaimed for service to the new republic—denounced again and driven from the seas! Yet I walked these streets when no merchant was too proud to traffic for the goods we brought from the gulf privateering. And again the good sea calls—again, again!"

At a small door in a high wall of the rue St. Peter, he tapped with his sword hilt. It opened; he stood within the small garden of the *Café la Veau Qui Tête.* A dim light

showed the wine tuns in the warehouse shadows.

Old Dominique, the worthy alderman, lifted a huge pewter mug in greeting. Half a dozen figures arose with smothered exclamations. They were about him, clasping his hands, whispering joyously.

"Thou—Captain Jean!" came a hoarse voice in the old *patois* of the coast islands. "Here are we all—ghosts, indeed, out of old days!"

"Johanness! Old brawler of the ports! I heard they had hanged you for the loot of the *Santa* off Grand Isle."

The huge seaman laughed his joy. "And thou! That the British sank thee off Galveston! Hang me? Ah, no!—the president's pardon, Jean! I—shame to say—peddle ducks and deer to the city markets. The very children point me out and put their fingers to their noses: 'Old Tete John,' they call me —I, who sailed with thee!"

"Better for you all than swinging at yardarms. Here is the worthy alderman; Beluche, with a lawful commission; Nez Coupe, still a fugitive in the deep swamp, I am told. And here, Monsieur de Almonaster!"

"Eh, well—" grunted Johanness. "Dominique brought the gentleman. Damn gentry, say I. Dominique fears to whistle lest it hurt his politics."

"We are, indeed, respectable," smiled the captain. "Only last year, I am told, my brother, Pierre, now a planter of St. James, was second to Monsieur St. Geme in a duel—that is getting into society indeed, gentlemen!"

"Pouf!" grunted Dominique. "Four inches off my belly and I'd be at sea again. Only to-day I argued with the mayor, Rouiffignac, that the city was better off when it fattened on the privateering. Was it not equal robbery when the Americans under Commodore Patterson looted our Grand Terre warehouses?"

"We should have fought instead of scuttling out—" grumbled Johanness. "The Yankees could not have taken us by storm. Glad they were later to have our fellows aid them. Who did General Jackson turn to but Captain Jean's skilled artillerymen when the British threatened the city? Bah! I never saw such a lame lot of dogs as our fellows were the day the pompous governor announced we were all recommended for a pardon! We stood

dangling our cutlasses, listening to lawyers' speeches praising us for saving the city, when we should have been to sea again. Captain Jean, thou wert the only wise one of the band —departing to the Texas country and seizing Galveston Island against the Spaniards. I could curse my heart that I did not enlist again with thee!"

"I intended to have the new establishment legitimate enough," murmured Lafitte, "but after the war the politicians lost no chance at Washington, nor with the Spanish viceroy at Vera Cruz, to poison all minds against me. When they sacked Galveston, I took young Bowie and went inland to the Santa Fé. That was my history since, comrades. I came back from the West, drawn by I know not what to tread these streets again."

The old buccaneers watched his calm face in the moonlight. He had taken off the hat and peruke; a bronzed handsome man with dark eyes tinged with melancholy—such was Lafitte, whom Byron described as:

"Leaving a corsair's name to other times,
Linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes."

"Eh, well," grunted old Dominique, "Pakenham would have taken the city in the rear if you had accepted the bribes the British offered you at Barataria. And in turn what have the Yankees done for you, Jean—scattered your fortune to the winds!"

"Aye, you enriched this city, and you stand a fugitive upon its streets!"

The captain raised his hand gravely: "I—am a citizen of the United States, gentlemen. Proscribed, just now, it is true—but—it might be I could serve again. There are curious things reported in the Mexicoes. Colonel Travis, I recall, and Crockett—and young Bowie were hot for me to join the Texans in a new republic. And in Kentucky—"

"Ah, but, my Captain," growled old Johanness, "what hast thou to do with their miserable politics of the day? The sea for us! Damned be this gabble of the town! Look you, what it has made of Dominique!—sitting, twiddling his thumbs on his fat belly! And Beluche—taking off and putting on his gilt chapeau, ticklishly, as if fearing to get dust on his gewgaws!"

"Cease your spewing," growled the Carta-

genian, "I sail with proper commissions, I would have you know, from Colombia."

"And be damned with your papers!" roared the old man. "Admiral? There does not live one for me!—nor councilors, nor nobility—young sprigs of dandies coming to pat our hard salted fists!"

He glared about, his gaze lingering on Count de Almonaster.

"Old man," said Raoul quietly, "you had better keep your place."

"Damnation!"

The old sea dog was starting up; Lafitte laughingly laid hands upon him.

"Sit down, old tar-ears! I shall beg pardon for you. I know—I know! Old days—old ways—it is hard to put things by." He put his hand affectionately on Johanness' shoulder. "Do you remember the time I sent you with the eight-oared barge to conduct Mr. Grymes back to the city—after the feasting, roaring week at Grand Terre?"

"Aye," interrupted Beluche, "the famous attorney who defended you and Pierre in the first indictment they issued against you for piracy!"

"And you sent word, Captain, that if the lawyers wished their fee, they must come fetch it from our fort at Grand Terre. The city wagered that Grymes would never return alive, but do you recall the week he ventured? The feasting, dancing, the drinking until the skies rocked, all in our guest's honor!"

"Aye, and me—" Johanness beat his hairy chest: "I, the bo'sun, it was, to whom Captain Jean entrusted the lawyer on the return. By the river we came, eight armed fellows pulling the barge and roaring chanties! At every plantation wharf we stopped, the advocate breaking bottles of the finest vintages o' Spain and shouting greetings. And on the deck, piled in the sun, forty thousand dollars in gold where all might see! Every gentleman's house from English Turn to the city gate must be routed out that Mr. Grymes could gamble against his hosts, so that, when our villains finally haled him into town, not a dollar did he have left of all his fee. E-oh!—even now they talk of it! Not in all Louisiana such princely hospitality as the famous attorney found in the house of Lafitte, the pirate!"

"Old man," smiled the leader, "I never liked that word!"

"I know. That is all I ever held against you, Jean! I recall the day you shot Gambio through the heart for boasting of a bit o' blood he let. You were ever a bit finicky for some o' our fo'cas'le scum, but I swear they loved you, Jean!"

The adventurer looked at the grim faces about the table. The silent Beluche, the complacent Dominique, the hairy bo'sun; and then the slender elegance of the Count de Almonaster. And to him he spoke gravely.

"You are hearing much, young sir. The city sleeping, and these old comrades creeping by stealth to greet me here."

"I've heard the old tales. I've dreamed—" he laughed slightly. "These are dull days. The gallants of the town at their écarté, or projecting some gentlemen's masquerade, or dancing attendance at the opera. They boast of making a little Paris of New Orleans; but who, Monsieur, wishes a little Paris after knowing the big one?"

"Your modesty, sir, is refreshing, after these town gallants who make one trip to the Oaks,

receive a rapier tip in the arm, and the rest of their days deem themselves bravos who have the ladies in a flutter."

"I have been twice abroad," said Raoul. "I saw a bit of pistoling in the Indies during the blacks' revolt. And there, among a ship-load of refugees, I met the affair that sobered me—made a man of the boy, Monsieur!"

"A woman," smiled Sazarac.

"A child. I fought for her in the flames of her father's house. When I lay wounded they sent her away, orphaned, in the ship captain's charge." He laughed: "That is all—a trifle of adventuring to Jean Lafitte!"

"Bah!" growled Johanness, putting back his long gray hair: "Women!" Then, seeing the figure on the bench that had snored the hour through, he forthwith kicked this hard couch from under it. An uncouth disheveled man struck the stones, rolled over and cursed them all.

"Jarvis!" growled the bo'sun. "He has seen more than you, Monsieur de Almonaster, and he has never handled a pistol in his life!"

"Jarvis?" Sazarac started back. "You did not tell me!"

"He is utterly drunk. We did not dare tell him in a public place because of his clattering tongue. Ho, Jarvis! At the drink again!"

The profligate staggered up, rubbing his eyes. "Damnation! Old rumheads, mulling away of Barataria days! I heard Johanness spouting of the pot of gold, the barge and all that! Of Jean again—" He broke off staring: "Do I dream—still in the liquor!"

"It is I, Jarvis. Come, clear your eyes!"

Jarvis reeled forth. "Jean, whom I painted at the famous isle! Jean!"

"Not so loud," grunted Dominique. "I hear the watchman whingwhanging down the street."

"Jean!" The two friends were greeting fondly. "Jean! I knew you lived. Jean of the *Petral*—my hand upon him!"

"And what have you done with your genius, lad?"

"I have learned to drink," retorted Jarvis, "drink and debt. Into jail and out again. Betimes I belabor Dominique for a dollar. He gives it with fatherly advice, and hales me to Père Antoine for reformation. Between the alderman and the priest I am utterly lost."

Dominique whispered to the leader: "I have a mind to see that the fellow is seized by a shipping master and clapped to sea in irons —for his own good."

"A pity," murmured De Almonaster. "The best families would befriend him, but he is oftener in the gutter than elsewhere."

"He would be at home anywhere—" Beluche watched the jester who had wandered back among the wine tuns searching for his pewter mug: "Do you recall how our rough fellows were amazed when we first tumbled him off a sacked merchantman down among us, and at once—with our pistols at his head—he began to bawl for drink? As I lived, thereafter, on the *Petral*, he feared nothing save that the next prize might have more gold than liquor!"

"He did us all honor," mused Lafitte. "Eh, the old faces about me!"

Jarvis, the youngest of them all, save Raoul, staggered to the table. "Piracy," he lamented, "ruined me! I was treated all too famously by the cutthroats. But, Jean—now, if we had a ship—eh, well! The drink this way!"

"Ah, the ship! It appears we have forgot-

ten why we are here! The ship? We have a ship!"

"A ship?" growled a new voice. Nez Coupe, the small wiry Canary Islander, with a face most frightfully disfigured by a saber cut, the most lawless of the former Grand Terre privateers, an outlaw still unpardoned, came to the table lamp. "What talk! Not one of us all could purchase a yawl boat!"

Beluche and Dominique fidgeted. Beluche gestured uneasily to the fastidious De Almonaster. It seemed he must speak; it was for that they had fetched him to the council.

"There is a ship appointed for a purpose," began the count, reservedly. "The Girod ship, fitted by the citizenry—for a certain purpose—"

"Bah! That Napoleon folly!" growled Johanness: "Child's play! Ah, but a ship for your eye, my Captain!"

The grim grizzled faces looked from the captain to the youngest man.

"It is difficult to announce," continued Raoul. "But I have, this day, taken over my aunt's interest, and that of Monsieur Allain, in the Girod ship. I have, therefore, a word

as to her. As you all know the Napoleon venture is not a secret. The mayor, Rouiffignac, the Creole families of the city, are heartily in sympathy with it. I have been against it until—Monsier Dominique proposed that we intrigue for Captain Sazarac to command."

There was a shout—derision, incredulity, protest. The wilder ones uprose feverishly. Only Jarvis waved a languid hand from his wine mug. "Ah—and only this week I heard Monsieur Almonaster jest of it with De Marigny! The emperor fetched to his room and board on the rue Chartres. He shall be a day's wonder in our new gentlemen's masque to celebrate Mardi Gras! We shall all chip in to pay Napoleon's board, and every one shall be pleased and happy! Oh, la!—what a town! They wonder why I drink, eh?"

Count Raoul had flushed under the painter's gibes. Dominique would have spoken, but Jarvis staggered up, cup in hand. "A toast! The plot! Ho, villains, all—to the plot!" And he roared the louder.

"The devil take you!" growled Beluche. "The watchman on the corner—"

Sazarac raised his hand. "I, to command?

What madness again! The young blades of the town are to man the schooner—they would be spanked to bed if Lafitte was to be known among them!"

"We have thought powerful influence could be brought to bear for your pardon, Monsieur. A rare exploit to reinstate you—seizing the emperor from his prison isle!"

Sazarac laughed idly: "Quite impossible. Gentlemen, I beg you—"

"A ship!" shouted Johanness, as if, suddenly, to his old eyes had leaped the vision of far sea days: "The *Seraphine!* Jean, and a ship again! By the devil's own, we shall do that, but damnation to Napoleon! A ship shaken free in the gulf, and any flag will serve!"

"Silence, you fool!" gasped Dominique.

"Perdition with aldermen! Ho, you—Beluche, with the gilt gimcracks on your shoulders—what do you think? Jean on the quarter-deck, and you and I at the lookouts? Name o' God! One crack at the fat fleets, and then south across the line!"

"In the swamps off Point Le Garde," shouted Nez Coupe, "I can enlist a dozen overnight who once sailed with Jean and Pierre!"

"Hist!" lamented Dominique. "They can hear you to the levee! Let the young gentleman talk; then our captain will have it clearly. He shall be Sazarac until we are cleared, Captain Gaspar Sazarac with recommendations from the Americans of the West. Monsieur de Almonaster will vouch for Sazarac. I, myself, the alderman, have known this worthy Sazarac who is to be the secluded house guest of Monsieur de Almonaster, and introduced aright ere we broach the Napoleon matter—"

Jarvis suddenly thrust his drink-swollen face close to the lamp. He grinned with tipsy awakening. "Why, so—this Sazarac! Ho, Jean!—a woman! You are overnight in the town, and at once a woman!" He fumbled in his breast and brought out a crushed flower, and laid it down with a mock flourish. "Did you ever, Captain Gaspar Sazarac—smell camellias in the moonlight?"

Sazarac looked silently at him. "My good Jarvis—"

But he checked his speech sharply. There came a firm rapping on the wooden gate of the garden. A quavering voice followed:

"Sirs, you will have to cease this reveling.

The lady in Madame Duvall's *pension* across the way complains that she can not sleep."

The old watchman waddled on. The group about the table was mute.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" gasped Dominique, the alderman, "I am glad the meddler did not know I was here!"

The admiral of Cartagena rubbed his nose with the top of his gold cockade: "It is agreed there was too much noise for a quiet tavern such as Monsieur Tinto's. The affair must not come to the authorities—certainly not!"

Sazarac stood glancing from John Jarvis to the camellia upon the table. The jester was grinning knowingly. The Count de Almonaster turned a puzzled face upon them both.

"The affair of the English woman," grumbled Beluche. "Twaddle of the gossipers on the promenade. A drunken fool, and an evil jest! Sazarac need not challenge. The scandal is upon Carr and his two women."

But Jarvis continued to leer upon the leader's silent face. "I wish I could paint love in a woman's eye—" he mocked. "Then there should be a mistress with a camellia in her

hair at my studio." He turned away to draw his measure of wine. And back in the shadows he began to roar a chantey of privateering days; a song in the slipshod Acadian *patois* of the coast parishes where the adventurers used to recruit from the youth of the rustic dances:

"Di tems M'sieu Lafitte,
Ye te menin monde a la baguette—"

"Silence that babbler!" snarled Beluche. "The police—"

"Be quiet, Jarvis," ordered Jean Lafitte.

"We are, indeed, making too much noise—the lady can not sleep," complained old Dominique. "You must remember I am the alderman—"

The young count suddenly broke to subdued laughter. And around the table strode Johanness, shaking the hair from his giant shoulders. "Name o' the devil! What have we come to, bullies all? The young gentleman is the only true companion o' my heart . . . the rest agree we disturb a lady who can not sleep! *Nom de Dieu!* In this accursed town a buccaneer must be abed by nine o'clock—lest a lady can not sleep!"

CHAPTER V

TWO GENTLEMEN OF MYSTERY

THE Honorable, the Mayor, Monsieur Rouiffignac, stood on the stone flags of the City Hall, or Principal, as it was yet called from the Spanish days, and looked contentedly out on the rue Chartres. He had come early, before the heat of the day, for some business with his clerks; and the rue Chartres, and the side-streets from the river to the Rampart were enlivened by the musical cries of negro sellers.

"Belles des figues! Bonne petit calas!"

And the dames waddled on, some with gold-hooked earrings shining under the greasy black hair of the Indian marketeers; some old slaves bearing great bundles of new-washed clothes in and out of the cool court gates; while on the high galleries of the houses, behind the iron grills, one caught glimpses of the gentry at their early coffee

whose good, fresh-roasted odors filled all the town at this hour. By ten o'clock, as the heat grew, the great wooden doors would be closed, the blacks would drowse in the areaways, and the residential streets deserted until the four o'clock dinner; after which La Nouvelle Orleans would appear fastidiously, to parade the levee in the coolness, or drive out the Esplanade.

"Heigh-o!" sighed the mayor. "A long day for me! The council will not meet until ten—but I shall cut them short! Old Dominique shall not pester me, all asweat under his interminable speeches as to completing the filling of the moat. The Americans of the Faubourg Marigny clamor more and more for city revenue, while the *Vieux Carre* goes to decay. Ah, there—good morning, Monsieur Mudge!"

Mr. Mudge, of the banking firm of Mudge & Fickert, was turning from the street: a tall and immaculate gentleman in high bell hat and new, long, tight trousers outside his equally tight boots; and behind him, the mayor noted, was Mr. Langhorne, the consul of Great Britain. The greetings were of punctilious respect.

"What makes you so early astir, gentlemen?" queried His Honor. "As for me—I am the most lamentably overworked man in Louisiana. The governor sends me vast communications—all in the English, these days, which, unfortunately, I can not read so well; and Monsieur La Tour, getting up his new city directory, insists that I read his proofs—and there is not a picayune victualer, nor a mender of pots that he does not get in so that New Orleans may claim rank with Philadelphia or New York! La—la! there are too many of us now!"

"You may well say," rejoined Mr. Mudge hurriedly, "complaint has already been made by the English captain—petty thieves made away with some of his merchandise on the Algierine dock. The customs people have pursued them—I believe one fellow was shot in a fracas down Bayou Barataria, near the plantation of Monsieur Berthoud."

"An outrage, sir," protested the consul. "In the name of His Majesty I must make representations—"

"It is an affair, sir," said Monsieur Rouiffignac politely, "more for the United States authorities."

"Yes, but they are laughing about the town, sir! Rough fellows of the wine-shops and the levees are all agog with this rumor that the bandit of Barataria has returned; and at once an outrage is put on the port's shipping!"

"Hum," said the mayor, "I know. Thirty cases of muskets, by some mistake, put out from the English ship on the dock. The port officers—"

"The captain of the *Genaron* has protested, sir," fumed the consul; "the cargo was destined for the Mexicoes. But some thieving villains take advantage of the question raised—"

"The Baratarians, Monsieur Mayor!" blustered the merchant; "the pardoned rascals of Jean Lafitte! The very rumor of his return disturbs commerce. Look, now—here comes old Gorgio, the crayfish seller—as big a villain as is unhung, pardoned by the president! And do you think he will trouble himself to step off the *banquette* when gentlemen come by, when he knows that half of Louisiana has come to think of Jean Lafitte as more patriot than pirate?"

"Hum—hum," mused the placid mayor; "some maintain that he saved the city in 1815.

Eh, my dear Consul!—but we are very good friends now, are we not? The British are very welcome—never was such good feeling as now under President Monroe—Yankees, Creoles and English alike in La Belle Louisiana! Hum—hum—and here comes Monsieur Dominique, who ought to know something about this idle gossip of Lafitte."

Mudge, the banker, bowed stiffly to the portly alderman; Langhorne, with a frown—there were some fastidious gentry who did not care for equality with the pardoned and Falstaffian buccaneer. But as long as his lusty constituency of the river levees returned him to office, not a fig did the worthy Dominique care for the blue stockings. The mayor turned slyly to him.

"Ah, Monsieur Dominique! The gentlemen ask of a matter upon which you might enlighten us. Lafitte's reputed return!"

The councilor raised a fat hand. "And if it were true rue Royale would be ribboned to welcome him, I do believe!"

The respectable banker shrugged. "Enough! Mr. Langhorne, we shall take our business to the Customs! The city is a trifler's town!

And this other jest—the sailing of the Napoleon ship. Mr. Mayor, the folly leaps and grows! Sober decent merchants entering the coffee-houses are badgered by young roisterers to subscribe to the plot Napoleon! Anything for a fanfaronade, even if it brought England and the United States to war!"

Langhorne, the consul, raised a hand laughingly. "The *Seraphine*, good sirs, will be well watched once these crackbrains put her nose out the passes! His Majesty is not atremble at this frolic!"

And with a bow the two gentlemen departed. Half a square distant, the consul turned to the banker.

"Colonel Carr, sir—has me distracted. He brings credentials from Quebec that I can not ignore, and yet I mistrust him. Styled as a commissioner to the rebellious subjects of the Spanish king in New Granada, he has seemed overbusied up the Mississippi on his way overland. I like it not, Mr. Mudge, when England and America seem at last in hearty accord on the president's declaration against the Holy Alliance's schemes to the south."

"You fear Carr's honesty? Faith, the fel-

low has been too drunken to be dangerous. And you know his brawl with this Captain Sazarac? I should say they are both men of mystery out of the Northwest. The old talk of Aaron Burr's rival republic in the Mississippi Valley is revived again; but if England is in it—"

"Perdition, sir! It is not so! He who comes to Louisiana thinking to find friction between the Yankees and the Creoles must be a better diplomat than Colonel Carr, sir—if that is what you mean!"

The merchant took snuff gravely. "We trust that he represents nothing but some malicious fur-traders, sir. Last night, I am informed, he had Madame Page's *pension* in an uproar. Starting to beat a black girl, he wound up by striking his wife; and then having a set-to with some unknown guest or caller. And the lady who is his wife, sir—is not of mettle to brook outrage."

"Mrs. Carr is of an old Tory family that fled from New York in the first war—bitter against the American government—far more than the British themselves. Then there is Carr's ward—"

"I had heard a famous beauty, sir."

"The young gallants already are agog for a peep at her when she is driven on the Esplanade. But the women seek absolute seclusion, humiliated utterly, at Colonel Carr's conduct."

"The girl is of value to Carr's schemes, you think?"

Langhorne took his snuff absently. "That is the question. She was of a family that had great estates in the islands. She is loyal to the Carrs through gratitude to those who saved her life."

The merchant glanced at the clock in the cathedral façade.

"Well, enough of this. The coffee-houses have already forgotten the affair of Carr and this adventurer, Sazarac."

"This week the sensation is choosing the crew under Bossiere to man the Napoleon ship. Nothing has so tickled the popular fancy of the Creoles!"

"I trust your government does not take it seriously?"

The consul laughed shortly. "We watch it, sir! The clipper may take twoscore gal-

lants out of the city, for if the thing is made fashionable enough, the *Seraphine* would sail with her decks crammed by ambitious admirals, commodores, captains and lieutenants! Bonaparte, himself, would be astounded at the array of perfumed gentlemen who would greet him in his exile!"

"Bossiere is to command," mused Mr. Mudge. "He, at least, is a seaman."

"And were he to order these young scions of the city's blue blood to holystone his decks, he would have to land in every isle of the Indies to settle the challenges! No, no—sir, Bonaparte is safe from these gentry!"

The two gentlemen smiled. But as they were to part, down the *banquette* of the rue Chartres came two figures, one supporting the other. A short, dark, ragged man whose gold earrings glistened under filthy locks, struggling to save his basket of cooked crayfish as he steered his companion on.

"Let be—" growled Gorgio, the Catalan. "Come, Jarvis—the *Café des Refugies* for you, man!"

"A ship!" bawled Jarvis. And being much the larger of the two he almost propelled the

crayfish seller into the two elegant gentlemen, who stepped aside in disgust to let them pass.

"A ship! A rescue, old buccaneer!"

He lurched to the *banquette,* and sat there blinking. Old Gorgio hauled in vain at his sleeve. "Come, be up with me!"

But the town's first Bohemian continued to fumble at his clothes.

"It was this way they went, Gorgio. I am even now on my way to the police to report of the affair. I have been in and out of the cafés since before dawn telling of it. I shall appeal to the mayor—Rouiffignac is not so dumb as to refuse rescue to a lady!"

"What does he babble of?" inquired Langhorne haughtily.

The painter got to his feet. He was bleeding from a gash across his brows. On his sleeve he laid a crushed and dirty camellia. Then, down the street came Mayor Rouiffignac and Councilor Dominique to see what might be this public scandal. And to them Jarvis suddenly shouted his grievance.

"I was fumbling along the rue St. Peter in the mud, sober as any honest man, save that the moon kept diving past me. And there

came a carriage that all but ran me down. The horses stumbled—and a lady screamed. She thrust an arm from the curtains—a white arm, I reached to touch. And a fellow within struck me . . . I got up later—I and my blossom. I swear she had more camellias in her hair! Eh, there—I have told it again! Now laugh, fools!"

"Where did you come upon this man, Monsieur Mudge?" said His Honor.

"Here, as you see—dirty and howling!" returned the merchant.

"Gorgio, take him home, and come to my clerk for a dollar," frowned the mayor. "It's drunkard's talk."

"Home?" blustered Jarvis. "A lady seized, spirited away in a galloping chaise through New Orleans' streets—and you say: 'Home!' Then romance is dead, sirs! I shall paint a fish-woman's shawl on my lady's head, and sorrow in her eyes. It was not so when Jean Lafitte was here!"

"You have dreamed—" muttered Dominique, watching him covertly. "Come with me, Jarvis."

"My skinned nose and brow—is that a dream?"

"He has stumbled nightlong about the streets," said Gorgio sullenly. Between the crayfish seller and the rotund alderman there shot glances of alert understanding. The Catalan nodded, stretched his hand to the painter and bent upon him a look of implacable fury.

"Let be!" grunted Jarvis. "Camellias? Let's see? Why, Jean—last night—"

"Silence—fool!" whispered Gorgio. He seized upon the fellow; he bore him along with his bull-necked strength against his back.

"He is utterly drunk," murmured Dominique. "Come, gentlemen—let us to our morning coffee at Maspero's!" He took the mayor's arm, turning him hurriedly. A block distant the councilor looked back, fiddling with his velvet cuff nervously. The Catalan vagabond was dragging his comrade on.

But none save the alderman saw that the hand of the one-time buccaneer was under Jarvis's arm, that his knife-point pressed there until the coat was torn.

"A word more," hissed the crayfish seller, "and—die!" Then he whispered: "Sazarac

. . . and the English woman? Jean—and the wager he won? Who, then, has better right to the woman? Home, now!—get your paint pots and paint a poultice on your broken head!"

But Gorgio had to drag the unconscious wastrel up the studio stairs, and there lock him in ere he went to a whispered conference behind a cabbage stack in the French Market.

CHAPTER VI

THE MASK IS DROPPED

It was after the heat of that same day that two horsemen rode out from a courtyard of the Faubourg St. Marie upon the Tchoupitoulas Road.

Count de Almonaster breathed relief when the river willows hid them and the steeds broke to a gallop. Already, above the *Vieux Carre* in the *Quartier Americaine* pretentious warehouses of bricks, stores and taverns, and rows of new, unpainted dwellings were arising behind the levee on whose river side lay the double-stacked steamboats which were the talk of the decade. The road passed neat truck gardens and homes of stucco, pillared ambitiously to resemble the stately places of the Creole aristocracy on the far side of the city along the Esplanade.

"My blacks are waiting at the ferry," murmured De Almonaster; "now, Captain Saz-

arac, did the plainsmen teach you to ride? Come, then!" And the guest led the way in a cloud of dust. A half-dozen slaves uprose as the two dashed over the levee, dismounted and flung rein to the grooms. Then the scow-boat swung off on the muddy Mississippi propelled by the naked-backed oarsmen.

Sazarac stood watching the willowed shores. The city was invisible, but on the western bank arose the stately façades of plantation homes among great oaks. Beyond this, glimpses of the grim, gray forest wall, the impenetrable cypress swamp, with its watery aisles leading to Barataria, the legend-haunted, even at this early day.

"The Americans even yet do not send their customs men down the bayous," said De Almonaster. "They are building a great fort on Grand Terre where stood your famed Red House, but they approach it by the sea."

"They hardly need that," returned the exile. "I, myself, proved that no foreign force can attack New Orleans from the south swamps. No, my friend, if trouble comes to them it will be from down-river and the west. If

sedition arose there, it would be a thousand miles of rough travel through the Carolinas ere Washington could recover the city."

The host smiled. "A rumor by every packet —a rebellion by every overland rider from Kentucky. New Orleans is a complacent little capital of its own, but it is absurd to think we favor breaking away from the Washington government. Aaron Burr found no support among us, you recall?"

Sazarac seemed to evade the topic. "This, your country place, Monsieur?"

"The nearer one. Our family estates are in St. James Parish. I treasure this for its hunting, and nearness to the city. Two hours, and I can be at the opera or Maspero's—and an hour in the other direction, down in your own haunts where law is the word of the clan." He stepped ashore as the scow grounded, and led the way across the broad lawns to the high steps of the porticoed gallery of the white mansion. Black boys dashed for the bridles. At the great glass doors arose a grizzled major-domo. Past into the wide hall, a visitor would know that no woman's hand had to do with the establishment. There

was a spotless, severe simplicity about the high quiet rooms.

"At your pleasure, sir," said Raoul. "A drink shall be brought, and the bath. I have a surprise, though, perhaps, not for a man from the West. Ice, Monsieur! Ice, cut in a slough near St. Louis, and brought to be stored in sawdust in my cellar! It is a great curiosity to my neighbors, the Duverges and Des Trehans, I assure you. Madame Des Trehan says I can marry into any family because of my ice-cellar—in the summer!"

"I have thought it strange"—Sazarac smiled absently—"that you—of the Spanish Almonasters, of wealth and connections beyond the proudest in the city—have chosen to idle unattached."

"I have my dream—" De Almonaster said gravely. "A boy's dream . . . but it does not pass. For six years now, the loveliest face that could stir youth has been with me. It was for that I cruised last year about the Caribbean ports—aimlessly seeking, slowly trying to forget. Ah, well! I am trying to be a practical sober man—financing the new sugar process!"

A Paramount Picture. *Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea.*

PRESIDENT JACKSON ORDERS "SAZARAC" TO LEAVE NEW ORLEANS BY DAWN OR BE SHOT.

With a bow he left the guest. The stranger looked from the great windows upon the gardens of yucca, oleanders in red bloom, sweet oranges and crape-myrtle about the ancient oaks. Beyond the narrow fields ran a rutted road, and Jean Lafitte smiled. Up that same road had come the clumsy carts of the smugglers who met the gulf adventurers in the swamp rendezvous and brought the loot of silks and wines and jewels taken from luckless merchantmen on the Spanish Main. By pole-boat from the coast, by carts to the river forest; and then, at dead of night, ferried by other agents across to the warehouses of the city. And to Pierre Lafitte's cloaking smithy on the rue Bourbon, came the winking merchants to watch the slaves work the forges while they slyly murmured to the proprietor: "I hear that a ship from Bilboa strangely foundered in Yucatan Strait? . . . What, pray, is the price of brocade and silver plate at Monsieur Lafitte's Red House at Grand Terre?"

"Hypocritical dogs!" muttered the master now. "I respect the roughest scoundrel of my own band more than the smug merchants who

enriched themselves on our traffic, covertly protecting us while they profited; eager to denounce us when our last ship was driven from the gulf!"

The liquor decanter was on a highboy of heavy rosewood. The adventurer's melancholy eyes lighted as he examined it, the great four-post bed, the table and the mirrors.

"Loot from Isle o' Pines! I recall Gambio's sweating blacks poling it from the swamp to be sold to a city factor! It turns up at De Almonaster's and I am entertained with it!"

His laughter had hardly ceased when he joined his host at dinner. Never a more well-appointed guest had Count Raoul greeted than the last sea-rover who sat across the board beyond the golden candelabrum. Italian, English, Spanish, came as easily to Jean Lafitte's lips as his French of Garonne. The younger man was thinking of their mystery—Pierre and Jean, who appeared from the seas twenty years before to assume leadership of the Grand Terre privateers, to organize a war upon gulf traffic that the struggling Republic at Washington could not destroy, and so finally summoned its leaders to a common defense against Pakenham's attack in 1815.

What their history, what, even, was their real name and identity, all Louisiana had never discovered. Two gentlemen of Garonne, polished, educated, affable, who chose to say nothing but to do much—and to shroud that in the spaces of the south seas—such were the brothers Lafitte.

Monsieur Sazarac raised a hand. *Pigeon a la Royale, salmi de bacassines,* woodcock with watercress, the brandies and *café noir.* He held a glass before him.

"As to the wine, young sir, I could swear there had been mischief in the gulf again!"

Raoul laughed ardently: "If ever, sir, one of my uncle's ships, which bring our wine from Bordeaux, had fallen your way, all the wars of Bonaparte had been nothing to the uproar he would have raised!"

"Come—" smiled the guest. "I would forget it all!"

"If we let you—" he signaled the serving men to withdraw. "Now, I am delegated by your own worthy companions for this—the Napoleon plot—is not that adventure enough?"

"More." Sazarac smiled distantly. "I am done with adventuring. I dream of a planta-

tion in the Indies. In Louisiana, even if again granted amnesty, my presence would be a sore spot. Let any thieving brawl come in the ports, and at once Lafitte's old men are charged with it. They are peaceful men now, scattered on the coast—hunters, raisers of truck, and fishers. Let the dead past lie, my friend. I am an evil legacy . . . and I am forty-two!"

"And yet—the lady of the packet boat!" mused Raoul. "Strange?"

"To her, Sazarac, the gamester—to you, Lafitte, the outlaw. And yet—" the older man stopped, his gaze out the glass doors to the starlight.

"And yet, Monsieur—Sazarac—what if you, of all men, brought Napoleon triumphantly out of his exile to the New World? What proud lady of all Louisiana would not be thrilled by the name—Lafitte!"

"Now, that is ridiculous," frowned the other man. "She—an English Tory—an intrigue to aid Bonaparte win her approval?" He laughed: "Ah, well, a lovely lady for whom I would have fought; and I had to turn aside in silence. I am Lafitte. That is the irony of

it—at forty-two, discredited, a fugitive under a mask . . . and she smiled upon the man who is the knave in either rôle. I did not challenge Colonel Carr," he concluded pointedly.

"I saw that." Raoul repressed his curious note. "We knew you went to confront him." He shrugged. "Come, my Captain Jean! I, too, have greatly loved—and lost. Now, this affair is of the sea and men. Would you not listen? You heard last night your old wild fellows chuckling with it!"

The guest stared hard at him. "Napoleon? The devil they would care for him! Tooth and nail on the first merchantman—loot, scurry, spend fistfuls of gold in the ports of South America—and then the yard-arm for them all! Monsieur, the world has shuffled off our gentlemen of fortune!"

"It is the English woman holds you from us," said Raoul, and then saw the black line deepen on the other's brow. The host bit his lip; and then upon the silence, there came rapid footsteps. A doorman was expostulating at the broad gallery. There was a scuffle, an oath.

"But I shall enter, fellow! Out of the door!"

De Almonaster had arisen by the silver-laden board, with a hasty glance at his guest's impassive face under the golden candelabrum, when the burly grizzled Johanness charged from the hallway. He turned without greeting, staring at Sazarac.

"You, Captain Jean! See, I have fought for you! A customs guard, I think it was, went down by the cutlass. Nez Coupe, Bohon and I stopped them from the first crossing, but the dragoons are here!"

Sazarac arose. The old buccaneer was sheathing his sword. Then he sprang to the great windows and drew the silken curtain. "I see the boat's lights," he grumbled surlily. "The city is in an uproar!"

"Monsieur," the guest turned to De Almonaster. "The thing I feared has come. My name, in some brawl on the water-front—"

"Your name?" shouted Johanness. "No! It is Sazarac they seek! Sazarac, the packet gambler! Damnation!—they put the affair straight on Sazarac!"

"What of Sazarac?" Raoul advanced wonderingly.

The old bo'sun laughed, his eyes glittered. He turned to his chief: "If you had told us, Jean, we would have had the woman miles beyond recovery, ere the word was out."

"The woman?" Sazarac eyed him sharply. "Old man, tell me this!"

"First they rout the packets. Then beat out the levee wine-shops. All that they knew was that you had vanished with the English woman!"

"Hold!" cried Sazarac. "With the English woman—"

"Jarvis, the fool, first told the tale, and no one believed him. Then the colonel's wife, then Carr, himself, like a madman to the authorities. She was heard to scream . . . a river guard says there was some commotion on a small boat off the rue Conti, but he thought it was a drunken revel. Dominique hurried me here to warn you—he, alone, knew you were a guest of Monsieur! I did not believe you would be here . . . unless the English woman—"

The sea adventurer had sprung as if to seize the old man's throat.

"She—taken—kidnapped?"

"Why, the tale runs—down to the Barataria swamps! Sazarac was heard to say he would possess her, bond girl or free!" Johanness grinned. "Here is my sword, Jean—before you and the English woman wherever she be!"

De Almonaster was watching a boat's lights on the dark river. "They seek Sazarac, then? Monsieur, can we explain sufficiently where you were last night? I do not question, but you will see the position—"

"Was she not fair game . . . if my captain desired her?" glowered Johanness.

"You will be quiet, Johanness. Stand by to watch the approach." He turned to his host: "This seems some incredible jest. The lady vanished—it appears worthy of John Jarvis's telling—"

Old Johanness gaped upon him unbelievingly. "It would seem you deny knowledge of it! Sazarac was recognized standing before her hotel when all the town was abed. Sazarac swore he would claim her. It seems that not until late afternoon did a servant discover she had been seized in her room. Then came Jarvis's story, piecing the thing

out. There is no doubt. The authorities are informed. The consul, the governor, the military!" He stopped, puzzledly watching his chief: "And Sazarac has vanished, you see!"

"There is work for me," muttered Sazarac to his host. "It is enough to say I had no hand in this. Come—throw the doors wide, Johanness!"

"You will have no chance! You will be recognized at once! It is a tale to hang on Jean Lafitte. The swamp, my Captain, ere the dragoons come!"

"Monsieur," Sazarac spoke apart to Raoul. "She was to speak of some matter of which her life appeared to be the price. The mystery—Carr's mission. The consul's embarrassment. Who could have taken Miss Lestron?"

"To the swamps without doubt," growled Johanness, "but she can not be hidden from swamp eyes. Jean, if you seek her—there is the trail!"

Sazarac swept to action. "True! My place is there—and free to follow her!"

De Almonaster grasped his hand as he stepped to the dark. "You will send me word,

sir? I am at your service, Monsieur—Sazarac!"

"The game is up for Sazarac! Lafitte, then, threading the secret swamp trails to unknown ends—Lafitte, again the fugitive, driven back to his old haunts as the hounds bay at the fox. Adieu, Monsieur! I am Lafitte."

De Almonaster heard a whispered laugh as the exile mounted a horse which the blacks had hurried from the stables. As he passed the gate, the old yard-man raised a frightened cry and dropped his flambeau.

"Massa Lafitte!"

De Almonaster ground his teeth in fury. "Silence that fellow!" he hissed to the house blacks. "Death to the one of you who whispers a word of this night's matters!"

Silently he ran back, up the rear way, and a moment more stood idly by the candles that shone on the remnants of the feast. The bronze knocker at the door dropped loudly. The frightened servant opened it. A young captain of the American dragoons stepped in hastily. He saluted, embarrassed now at his abruptness.

"Your pardon, Monsieur de Almonaster—"

"Ah, Captain Roche! Will you enter?"

"Thank you. We are seeking information. A young woman of the party of Colonel Carr of the British Mission, waiting to embark for Vera Cruz, has been seized. The clues lead to this west shore, apparently near your place, Monsieur. The British consul threatens to involve the two governments—it is said that the gambler, Sazarac, has done this trick . . . and that he is in reality Jean Lafitte, turned up from the dead!"

"Ah!—incredible!" murmured De Almonaster. "The famed beauty, Miss Lestron! Possibly I am the one man in New Orleans who has not seen her."

The young officer seemed more embarrassed. "I am sorry to say, sir, that my information was to the effect that this Sazarac was your guest. It is regrettable that I must inquire and search—"

The host bowed: "My compliments to the governor, and say that, to-night, Monsieur de Almonaster Roxas did, indeed, entertain at dinner, Captain Gaspar Sazarac of the American Explorations."

"Ah, but—" gasped the dragoon captain.

"It is a villainous affair that is charged to Lafitte, the returned freebooter! Where, Monsieur, is he?"

"Where could he have gone? The river on one side—the swamp on the other. It is lamentable!"

"I demand him, Monsieur!" The young officer was getting angry.

The host concealed a yawn. "I recall that, once, in the old days, the governor of Louisiana demanded him. He sent word to the governor that he would receive the governor at any time the governor wished to call at the Red House on Grand Terre. The governor did not call, I believe."

Captain Roche glanced impatiently at the tall black hats of his dragoons glistening in the torch-lights. "Well, then! A cordon of troops on the back plantation roads. The man will be taken before morning!"

"A long day, Monsieur—" murmured De Almonaster.

The officer turned perplexedly. "At least, this! Did this Sazarac resemble Lafitte, the outlaw?"

"They might have been brothers," said Raoul languidly.

"What did he have to say, this bandit?" retorted Captain Roche.

"He praised the woodcock. As for the broiled pompano, it was superlative. And my wines—ah—you should have heard!"

"Perdition, sir!" roared the American captain. "It must be as I have been told—half of old Louisiana was in league with this pirate! The town is laughing, even at this infamy put upon the subject of a friendly power. If Sazarac was Lafitte, they gossip that she probably fled willingly with him!"

"Not to my broiled pompano," mused De Almonaster. "See? He left nothing of it save the bones."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE OLD HAUNTS

"Now, see—the Captain!" roared old Johanness, shaking the pole support of the palmetto thatch in his truculence. "I—the bo'sun of the *Petral*—brought him. You older fellows, there! He commands you in this affair of the English woman. And you" —he leveled savage eyes upon the younger islanders who crowded under the thatch— "does any man speak against me?"

There was no answer. The sweating, motley crew pressed closer to stare at Jean Lafitte. To the young men he was already a legendary hero of their father's day. Under the thatch the steam of the cooking pots went up unheeded. A sullen Indian crone or two went on with their basket weaving under the shade of the scrub oaks of the Temple shell ridge which lifted a few feet above the illimitable, salt grass prairies. Brown-skinned,

half-breed babies crawled around the hard-packed dirt floor, and the mosquitoes buzzed in the smudge smoke.

Gaspar Sazarac—henceforth Jean Lafitte to the gathering members of his old adventuring crew which once had numbered a thousand men at the Red Fort on Grand Terre reef sixty miles to the southward—arose and looked at the silent faces.

"First," he said sternly, "I want to know this matter of the muskets stolen from the English ship at the Algiers wharf? It has a bearing upon this mystery of Mademoiselle Lestron, I imagine. The customs officers and the British skipper alike are in an uproar over it. Black Mike—speak!"

"An itch to be looting—that and the drink," muttered Black Michel, uneasily. "An Irisher in the English crew, who once had sailed with Paul Jones, and later taken and impressed into the king's navy—he wished to desert, and meeting up with Bohon, and John Crackley, who had fled from the navy but a week before, he proposed to seize the muskets. It appears they were unloaded by a mischance from the *Genaron.* The skipper protested to

the Customs that the arms were destined for the Mexicoes and not for this port. And while they quarreled of it, our fellows lugged them off. Old Budge was the dock watchman, which made it easy."

"And you, Black Mike—what was your part in it?"

"Oh, nothing! They smuggled the stuff on my lugger, that was all, and cached it on St. Joseph's Island. Surely, my Captain, you will not reproach me over a little affair like that!"

There was a hoarse laugh. Even the captain smiled.

"Thirty cases of new muskets—three thousand rounds of ball—who knows when we might need them?"

The captain looked out to the tidal bayou winding through the pathless morass to the Mexican Gulf. At the water's edge, past the scraggy, hurricane-riven oaks, lay a dozen trappers' pirogues—slender swift canoes hollowed from a single cypress log. Beyond, at their moorings, swung a trio of red-sailed luggers, with the smoke of their charcoal pots drifting lazily into the air.

"Bohon—" Jean summoned the swarthy

Portuguese smuggler from the throng. "Your lugger—twelve men to the sweeps, for there is no air. I must see the deserters from the English ship. The *Genaron* was to convey the British Mission to Vera Cruz. See here—you? Has there been among you of late, any man who whispered against the American occupation of Louisiana? Not openly, as did Captain Lockyer of the *Sophia,* who, as you older men will remember, landed at our fort with a royal commission for me, and the king's gold for all who would betray New Orleans to Pakenham's fleet?"

There was a shout. "Aye! The British got our answer at Chalmette! Who fought the Yankee bat'ries but our Grand Terre gunners!"

"Even Old Hickory did not question where they got their skill wi' the twenty-four-pounders!"

The old dogs laughed the harder. Rough shaggy fellows in shirts of faded green and blue, barefooted for the most, filthy muskrat traps dangling at their belts where once they had worn cutlass and pistol before the president's pardon.

"Nothing of sedition," answered Bohon finally. "Few of us dare go to the city even now. There is always a peg on which to hang one of Lafitte's men. Let a sheep be stolen up in the North parishes, and at once the Baratarians are charged with it!"

"Come," said the chief. "The older of you with Bohon on his lugger. The others to their camps. Not a man of you shall lift hand against the law for me. If you can serve me further you shall be summoned. Come—Rigo! Black Mike—Nez Coupe. We shall talk to the deserters first."

They made way for him to the beach. Old Rigo was laughing softly:

"Old days are come! Jean—and at once, a fair enterprise! A woman—and a ship! And down at the old isle where Yankees burned our fort, I have pumpkins growing—beautiful yellow pumpkins! Eh, *bien!* Perhaps we shall see another color o' gold among my pumpkins, wi' Jean among us once more!"

Six men to a side, the lugger crept down the mirrored bayou to where it opened to a shallow lake red in the warm sunset. Back on the Temple, the whispering swampers

scattered to their pirogues. Fast and wide the word would go through watery forest aisles and into the grass jungles of Barataria. Never a customs boat could leave the city but that keen eyes noted, and paddling couriers spread the warning far to the most secluded *cheniere* of the deep swamp.

"Look you," growled the steersman, Bohon, to Joe Rigo, "the old fellows gathering like buzzards, furbishing up rusty dirks and smelling venture on the very wind that brought Jean to us. Name o' God!—I am young again!"

Dusk fell with the shadowy lugger, its huge sail limp in the calm, moving through the phosphorescent water, churned up by the sweep oars. Forward the captain and Johanness, the bo'sun, conferred in the soft coast *patois*. Each cypress clump, every oaken point in the grassy sea, brought a gleam of memory to Lafitte's eyes. Hunters, fishermen, pickers of moss and oyster diggers—such the denizens of the "Free State of Barataria" had become since the president's pardon, but the region had not changed—a land of dying forests, laved by the low gulf tides that crept

upon them through glittering salt marsh channels; of gleaming shell reefs and tiny islets, uncharted and unapproachable save to the natives; and to the south the blue gulf, unflecked by a sail in the lonely bight stretching westward from the Mississippi passes.

Bohon glanced at the first stars. Eastward a dim smudge showed on the grassy bayou margin. "John Kelly will be there—and Mariano, the Manilaman. And others, Captain. There will be a drinking, for three casks of wine went from the Algiers dock along with the arms. And the English lads, Captain—you will not have them delivered to the consul?"

"Did you ever know," laughed Jean, "of me kicking back any man to the press gangs—white, yellow, brown or black—who ever reached the swamp?"

"Do you remember when our men went recruiting to the Acadian dances and shook their gold before the country youth—a speech, a song, a revel—that would carry every restless spirit of the parishes back to our fort to serve you, Jean?"

There was a shout in the starlight. To the

lugger's side swept a half-dozen canoes. Old whiskered fellows would not be denied—they clamored over the gunwales, and stood roaring their welcome to the one-time dictator of the Barataria coast. A torch gleamed among the palmettos as Bohon's men slid the anchor to the mud. Then they crowded aboard to shout, to shake his hand, amazed that he lived, eager to hear of the lost leader.

But Bohon led the way ashore. The one-time privateers trooped behind the guides to another palm-thatched camp under which were stored the stolen wine casks, the boxes of ammunition and scattered muskets. The English deserters, red-eyed, reeling from drink, looked upon the party with suspicious eyes, although the swamp men had heralded Lafitte's coming.

"Welcome, Captain!" shouted old Budge, the dock watchman. "I came with these lads. It must have been in the very air that you had returned, for—of a sudden—I had the notion of plunder! Look you—two more lusty seamen from the *Genaron* are here!"

"The mate laid twenty lashes to our backs because we could not explain Burke's get-

away," said one. "We slid down the chains, sir, and are done with the king's shilling!"

"Lafitte!" cried another. "I sailed in a bark that took a round shot from you once off Trinidad! Come, my hand to it that I serve you now!"

The laughter and the drinking arose once more. Clearly the exile perceived that the swamp outlaws had no other thought than that he had come to revive again the marauding against the West India merchantmen.

He led aside the eldest of the deserting seamen. "Come, of the *Genaron?* What is her mission in the gulf?"

"I wish I could answer, sir! She sailed regularly, but she is stuffed with arms. Vera Cruz was to be her entry port, yet why carry arms to the king o' Spain's men? We were warned to say nothing of her cargo. When the Yankee Customs discovered them, I hear the British consul was embarrassed. Colonel Carr had hand in it, the fo'cas'le said."

"Carr?" spoke up a youthful deserter eagerly. "Why, that is the blustering officer who wrangled with the skipper when they bundled the woman aboard!"

"The woman!" demanded Lafitte. "What of this—quick!"

"But the other night. The watch was hustled below when they brought her. Then it was up-sail and away without waiting to settle this quarrel about the muskets which a drunken supercargo put off and into the Customs' hands by a mistake."

"Sailed!" The chief laid hands upon his shoulder. "Lads, is it true?"

"Some dirty affair, sir. Burke and Crackley and myself saw it. Slave, free woman of color, to be sold in the Indies, or whatever she was—we can not say. They took her to the master's cabin. There was no law to it, I warrant, but when we lads saw that the *Genaron* was to put out hastily we took our leave o' her!"

Lafitte swept about upon Bohon. "Mademoiselle Lestron on the *Genaron,* and the bark adrift to the passes! What can she make, sir, with this wind?"

"Steerage, nothing more. She will not have passed English Turn—"

"Forty men by daylight at the river side! She shall be boarded in mid-stream, Bohon.

Johanness—back to the Temple and summon every lad!"

There was a gasp of incredulity. The leader had turned back to the smuggler's landing. The older privateersmen followed. The deserters stumbled among their wine casks. Then the leader of them, John Crackley, a long, thin-faced villain of the crimp-gangs, roared to the others.

"I told you, bullies, if ever we found this Lafitte there would be rough work to do! The *Genaron*—burn her to the water's edge, say I—and a knife to the mate for the cat he laid on our backs!"

The messengers paddled off in the starlight while about Jean gathered his old friends. And presently, across the shallows, came another small boat, swept by four black oarsmen to the smuggler's stern. A cloaked figure stepped out and grasped Lafitte's hand.

"Monsieur de Almonaster!"

"The mask is useless, sir! I came to warn you. The dragoons seized my house-servants, and bullied them into confession. Sazarac! The city shouts with it! Jean Lafitte has stolen the English colonel's ward!"

"Sir, you know better. I, indeed, know where she is. Mademoiselle Lestron has been put to sea. I take it, to hush her mouth. She would have spoken something dangerous to Carr's purposes. What these are, in all, we can not say. But the lady of the river packet is a prisoner on the *Genaron*."

The count stared at him bewilderedly. "None in the city know! Carr roars his indignation—he leads the cry that Jean Lafitte put his old Barataria refugees to the abduction. Half a dozen expeditions are fitting out to search the swamps. Captain, you can not linger here!"

"The *Genaron*—" said Lafitte curtly. "If she does not fetch a sailing wind before she makes the outer passes, sixty of the Barataarians will swarm her chains for boarding before daylight. Will that be answer enough to the city, that Lafitte is here again?—the old fox in his hiding-place?"

"A mad scheme!" muttered Raoul. "But—ah, well! For a woman! I trust, sir, you see it is an act of piracy against the vessel of a friendly power in American waters?"

The exile laughed grimly. "The dice are against Lafitte, the honest man!"

"Sir, does she know your identity?" pursued De Almonaster gravely.

"Can you ask? Lafitte—for whom her countrymen have a gallows built in every port that flies the king's flag? Come, sir! This is man's business! Every hour counts—every moment. She will know, soon enough, when a proscribed outlaw frees her . . . and turns away to face his ring of enemies."

And suddenly old Bohon dashed to his feet and held a finger to the air. He touched the skin with his lips and held it again.

"Damnation!" he shouted. "The air is changing! It is swinging northerly! A breeze in the river, and she will make the passes before a man of us could lift hand against her!"

It was true. Five minutes later the lugger lurched slowly around in the tide. The big sail began to lift and stream in the starlight. Johanness came aft cursing the stir of the water.

"I tell you it can not be done. If we had a thousand armed fellows in the narrows what could they do with cockleshell dugouts to board a ship drawing sail?"

They listened to the lapping water on the lugger's side. And now, from the oak-grown islet, there came a stumble of feet, a clatter of arms, and then a splashing in the starlit shallows.

"Aye, bullies!" roared John Crackley. "I said if ever we met this Lafitte there would be proper work for you!"

The deserters and the younger swamp islanders were swarming out, drunken and with ribald cheers, under their smoky torches. "A-Barataria!" one of the pardoned outlaws cried. It was the old boarding sea-yell of the *Black Petral's* crew, and it struck with a curious cold prophecy to the heart of Lafitte. Fate was bearing him, do what he might, back to the lawless years of the youth he had put by.

"The devil's hand is in this," grumbled Johanness. "This wind—it will be a good ship's wind in the passes. The *Genaron* will be in blue water to-morrow noon!"

"It is fatal to our plan of boarding her in the river," mused Lafitte. "And the plan must change with the wind. If we had a weather boat off the old isle—"

"A boat!" growled Nez Coupe. "But in all these coves, where once we counted forty sail and two hundred guns, there is nothing worth a nutshell on blue water. Bah! We took the president's pardon!"

"A ship!" snarled Black Mike. "Seize a ship! Damnation!—how does a man find a ship? Why, name o' God—he takes her!"

And suddenly De Almonaster whirled on the silent leader with glowing eyes. "A ship? Why, there in the city—moored at the Place d'Armes!"

"The Napoleon ship!" shouted Johanness. "Why, curse my eyes, that is a ship, but death to the perfumed gentry that own her!"

"The *Seraphine?*" cried Bohon. "Why that beauty would sit ahead o' the English bark and laugh in any weather!"

Lafitte was staring half-amusedly at De Almonaster. "Monsieur, the *Seraphine* lies in the very heart of the city, under the guns of every fort and warsman there!"

"Well, then—threescore of your swamp fellows gathered secretly by the Algiers shore, and crossing the river at midnight could board and have her under way ere the port awoke.

Once off the passes, she could overhaul the bark. She is gunned for the best of them, but there would be no need. The *Genaron* could not fight—she would give back the lady . . . of course the admiralties at Washington and London would howl, but"—the young man shrugged indifferently—"the affair would be over."

"Over? Monsieur, are you mad?"

"Ah, I had forgotten that I possess a certain interest in the *Seraphine!* Of course, I really know nothing about such madness! I am amazed—I denounce it much as I denounce this Saz-a-rac who—a dinner-guest of mine—is discovered to be Lafitte, the pirate!"

He took his snuff debonairly. And suddenly, with a shout of joy, the hairy giant, Johanness, seized the count's slender hand. "There—once more! I told you, Jean, when the nightwatch tapped on the door and told Beluche and the timorous Dominique to cease gabbling that a lady might sleep—that this young aristocrat was the truest adventurer of us all! Now, he proposes a ship! A ship for Sazarac!"

The Captain Sazarac in turn grasped De

Almonaster's hand: "Well, then! Bohon, get word to the Temple! Choose your fellows well, and have them come by the water trails secretly to Monsieur Berthoud's plantation across from the upper city. And not a field-hand nor house-slave must so much as have sight of a shirt-tail of you all. No liquor, there! No brawling, until we have descended by the old smuggler's road and taken the Napoleon ship!"

The score of figures crowded on the lugger's deck, or wading waist-deep about her bow, holding the flambeaus and striving to listen to the conference, raised a hoarse cry. Crackley, the leader of the deserters, strove for dominance over the younger men.

"Eh, bullies! I told you there would be blood-letting, once we had the man to lead us! A ship, and then over the line at the king o' Spain's traffic, says I!"

At a word from Bohon there was a scattering of the islanders from the smuggler's rail. A whispered conference here and there; secret orders given; gesticulations of surprise and exultation, as the lieutenants explained what must be arranged.

At the lugger's bow there now stood but two figures. The gamester, Sazarac, had placed a hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"You peril your life and your fortune, Monsieur. There is but one stake for which I would accept such a mad offer from a friend. One night, upon the staircase at the hotel, I said bluntly, merely as a vagabond may speak his thought, with nothing to lose or gain—that I loved the lady of my wager at Maspero's. I went my way, asking no answer. The moonlight was on the palms and myrtle . . . I could not well see, but I thought something fell and vanished from my sight. It might have been her answer."

"Very likely it was the lady's answer," smiled De Almonaster.

"Eh, well! Out of the shadows it came—into the shadows it vanished. It appears to be like my life. It seems to have the prophecy of my love. Ah, a curious thing!—a flicker in the moonlight—and silence!"

"I offer, Monsieur, a ship, my friendship, my fortune—to compel the lady to answer!"

The bronzed adventurer laughed slightly. "Thank you, Monsieur!"

But suddenly his companion started with an amazed gasp.

"Sazarac, I have forgotten something! Perdition! It just came to my dullard mind! The plot is to seize the *Seraphine* to-morrow night as she lies at her moorings before the Place d'Armes!"

"Certainly the venture can not be delayed a moment beyond that—"

"Well and good! But it is the night of the banquet to celebrate the plot Napoleon. I, myself, am to make a modest speech of acceptance for my aunt, the Baroness Pontalba, as I take over her interests in outfitting the *Seraphine!*"

"I should say, it is very well. Putting back to the city at once, with your blacks, and appearing at the affair, you are shielded from all connivance with what the infamous Sazarac may do."

"Ah, but!" exclaimed De Almonaster. "There is to be a ball at the Theatre d'Orleans. The youth and chivalry of the city are to dance there, and then away to the *Seraphine* herself to revel and drink to the plot upon her decks."

A Paramount Picture. *Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea.*

JEAN LAFITTE REFUSES TO LEAD THE PLOT TO RESCUE NAPOLEON.

"At what hour, Monsieur? I admit this is disconcerting."

"At twelve o'clock. The ship will be ablaze with lanterns and hung with ribbons! *Nom de Dieu!* It is too late to change the affair! I could bite my fingers that I did not think of the banquet. Commander Bossiere will preside. De Marigny, Barre, Pierre Des Trehan, young De La Vergne—the officers of the garrison and the municipality—the affair will be an uproar until sunrise!"

"Midnight," commented the other. "Well, then—by Bonaparte, himself—Monsieur Sazarac shall attend. He will stand at the banquet table in the emperor's suite and toast the absent guests. He will be the ghost out of the dark, and fleeting on to the darkness that awaits him. He will be brief in his rôle, this Sazarac—grasping at a flicker of moonlight; and for his answer—silence."

CHAPTER VIII

THE REVELERS OF THE PLACE D'ARMES

In the dusky radiance of the chain oil-lamps suspended from corner to corner, the vagrant candle-seller held his handful of green wax myrtle tapers high, peering up at the iron gallery to the possible customer.

"Belles chandelles! Petits belles chandelles—Madame!"

The magnificent lady ignored him with disdain, and the shabby old figure shambled on with its cry:

"Belles chandelles, M'sieu! Madame—belles chandelles!"

At the corner of the rue Royale and Orleans just behind the cathedral, the peddler stopped and hitched his cloak higher over his basket. The rue d'Orleans was a blaze of light showing forth the low façade of the famous ballroom. From carriages, dusky, bejeweled women were alighting; and across the cobbles grooms led horses from which gentlemen had

just dismounted to wander by groups to the barroom or to the crowded vestibule of the Quadroon ball. Laughing, jesting gallants, some of more youthful appearance glancing rather timorously up the street, for this was a frolic not countenanced openly—and yet the gentlemen of the town and the plantations would be there. Favorites and mistresses—the famed beauties of the *demi-monde*—and perhaps a few better recognized were lured to the Ball d'Orleans to wonder curiously how brothers, fathers and lovers might comport themselves at the revel.

The old candle-seller, in the shadow of the trees in the cathedral garden across the rue Royale, watched unceasingly. Behind him lay the narrow-paved Alley St. Antoine between the church and the gloomy, high-galleried buildings jutting over it. The other end opened on the Place d'Armes; and beyond that, the levee where there was a group of lanterns forming an arch over a carpeted gangway that led to the deck of the gaily-lighted *Seraphine*.

The candle-peddler looked each way casually. At length, from the crowd before the

ballroom vestibule—amidst the flash of carriage wheels, sleek-coated animals turning among the bright-coated gentlemen and shouting hostlers, there came one brown-skinned fellow tugging to hold back a spirited steed. Unsteadily, as if by chance he was jerked on by the horse, the groom finally held up at the *banquette* of broad stones on which stood the idle candle-seller. To him the groom muttered:

"Monsieur Almonaster is here. He thought it best. They gibe him roundly about the affair Lafitte, but he protests—he has given half his plantation force to the military and the city guard who are beating out the woods for the stolen lady. He has denounced as deeply as any against the outrage—and he thought it best to come join the gallants. How goes it, Gorgio?"

"With the few of us in town—well. And be assured across the river, the Captain Jean will have his fellows ready! Be on, now! You must not talk to me over long. Only, Teton, we idle here, armed and watchful—and a word from your master—"

"Monsieur de Almonaster is to send word

by me—I am to hang about drinking with the servants at our side entrance—watching."

"Word must come in time—before the party leaves for the ship—we must know that an hour before."

"My master will be assured. The fun grows furious already—it will be dawn ere they think of supper on the *Seraphine*."

"Be gone! Here comes one of the police guard!"

The quarter-blood groom led on De Almonaster's horse. And again the candle-seller raised his monotonous cry down the rue Royale. And from the river end of Antoine's Alley wandered another figure; at the deep entry to the Padre's house, midway in the tree-shaded obscurity, the old Andalusian beggar sank on the stones with a sigh—and adjusted the pair of pistols at his belt to more ease.

When Gorgio wandered this way again, the vagrant seemed asleep. Then came his mutter: "Perhaps, on the rue de la Levee—by the first market stall, there might await a customer. Thou art too noisy at the best for the Padre's street, eh—*Frère Diable?*"

"Custom is bad at least," retorted Gorgio, "but you—the police will harry you on as well."

"Not with Padre Antoine, my good friend, above at his book," growled the other. "Do as I bid—I was sent."

And on idled the candle man, with his owl-cry to the galleried homes. Under the thick arches of the ancient market he bantered hoarsely about the cabbage and fowl stalls. At this hour the market was little visited and few kept open. A few lazy Indian women and mulattoes grumbled back at Gorgio's jests; an early cart or two backed in to unload for the morrow's business, and it was to one of these, on which a trio of trucksters smoked idly, that the old man came.

They shot down dark inscrutable glances.

"Pierre," muttered Gorgio, "you are in charge of these?"

"In all, sixteen of us, sleeping about the stalls," came in the *patois*. "The police guards note nothing. But of the fellows who must cross by the river, there is delay. What was the hour?"

"It can not be set to a moment. At mid-

night, the ball must have taken every idler from the Plaza to crowd about and gape at the gentry. Save for the cursed lights about the ship itself, all would be clear. It must be touch and board quickly."

"Two of Johanness' men are already enlisted in the crew. They report all well, save that old Bossiere fusses about the tables on the deck—the lights and wine and cuisine keep the servants all astir."

"He will go to the ball later. As commander of the Napoleon expedition, and the affair in honor of the *Seraphine's* departure on a next week's tide, the young bravos will have him in the whirl."

"Monsieur de Almonaster's groom is to fetch the first word to me—I to Peter, the beggar, who plays the sot on the steps of the Padre's house. He to you in the market—then you to the lantern signal under the rue Toulouse landing. Then the six boats shoot with all speed from the other shore. At the first commotion as they swing aboard, your fellows rush openly from the market, cast off the mooring lines and join. It is overboard with any who oppose."

"The wind is capital—although making English Turn we shall have to pull-haul, doubtless. But who can pursue save one of the steamboats—and by the time the uproar goes that far—*Bien!*—what of it?"

"A shot from an eighteen-pounder and the tea-kettle will hestitate," growled Gorgio. "All is ready—waiting Monsieur de Almonaster's word for the river signal."

The swarthy-skinned marketmen laughed; their roving glances went from the idle croons at the stalls to the load of cabbages under which there protruded one rusty cutlass hilt which Gorgio now frowningly pushed back. Then he was on with his droning cry about the dark streets of the *Vieux Carre.*

Meantime, at the Ball d'Orleans, the fun was rising fast. The door, the deep-set windows, the low galleries about the hall, were filled with onlookers; while to the strains of a waltz from *Les Amours du Diable* sensuous women and fiery-tempered men whirled in giddy mazes. Frowned on by the aristocracy, and taboo with the haughty ladies of the *Vieux Carre,* yet few there were of the young fashionables who would not steal, now and

then, to the revel. There, arose the quarrels that led to the duellos out under the Oaks; there, on an instant, the scene might change from laughing, and men rush together in affray; or two of the hot-tempered dons of the old Spanish or French régime, or some restless Kentuckians, down-river, would exchange the cards that meant rapiers or pistols at sunrise.

The young Count de Almonaster was in a chaffing coterie at the vestibule. The town had been agog with this story about him to-day.

"Ho, Raoul!" cried De Marigny, "where is your new house guest?"

"Yes,—Raoul, the proud, entertaining this gallant Saz-a-rac! Better you had counted the family silver ere you put him to bed! They say Lafitte put out from your hospitality to the Barataria swamps—and at once a lady disappears from her hotel!"

"I am just back from a search myself. It was a shabby trick, but—"

The laughing gallants crowded nearer. "Lafitte turns up, and at once Louisiana is in an uproar! The British consul fumes, and

Colonel Carr denounces. His lady may well be in the tropics within a week!"

"Bah!" shouted the Chevelier de Montrieul, "here is Alderman Dominique, who was once buccaneer himself! I say, we are unworthy gallants! Under the Spanish governors we would all be out seeking to rescue the lady ourselves, rather than leave such romance to the authorities."

De Marigny twigged Raoul's laced cuff: "Come, we have a new beauty. I shall introduce you for one of the new *contre-danses Anglais*."

"I," retorted Raoul reservedly, "do not dance here as you know."

"Why so haughty? A round, and we are all off to the *Seraphine*."

Raoul started. This would never do; the conspirators must seize the clipper before the party assembled on her decks. He was relieved to see Captain Bossiere—already chosen to command—come on smiling, waving a hand to the merrymakers.

"Messieurs! Is it not enough here? We shall make a long night on the *Seraphine* and discuss affairs. Ah, Monsieur Dominique, I

am glad you are with us! And Monsieur de Almonaster, who has been won over at last to support the Napoleon expedition!"

Many curious and admiring eyes, indeed, were leveled on the tall, bronzed young man who followed to the bar. Old Dominique winked again at him. A buzz of talk ran around concerning these two who surely must know something of the affair Lafitte which they chose not to disclose to the authorities.

De Marigny shouted good-humoredly to Raoul.

"We are discussing the flag, Monsieur! A flag for the *Seraphine!* La Barre insists it will not be good taste to fly the American colors now, with England and the United States at peace. Under what flag, Captain Bossiere, do we put to sea?"

Good Captain Bossiere pulled his whiskers and beamed on the laughing gallants. "That is to be settled. Also, to-night, who is to be second in command."

"And third!"

"And fourth!"

"And," bawled another youth, "I trust to be at least a midshipman!"

The flushed and merry Creole blades gathered closer. The costliest champagnes were spilling over bar and tables. Under the glitter of the crystal lamps, where the press was deepest, Captain Bossiere perspired and tried, in vain, to address them. From this laughing mêlée Dominique, the alderman, velvet-clad and rotund, found way and came to De Almonaster's side.

"And to-night," he muttered, "I wander about, a respectable official of the city—and the sea is calling. As to Jean," he said with pointed abruptness: "what do you know, Monsieur?"

The young aristocrat could not be sure of how much the city conspirators had imparted to the complacent Dominique. He therefore shrugged indifferently: "The old fox is on familiar trails, Monsieur Dominique—do you know of any reason for absenting yourself to-night?"

"Eh?" queried the alderman darkly. Then, a hand on his shoulder. Jarvis, the portrait-painter of the *Vieux Carre*, for once cleanly arrayed in velvet, beruffled stock and a high hat! Jarvis, incredibly sober. Nodding to

Alderman Dominique, he drew Raoul aside.

"The fools found I was right, eh? A lady stolen from our streets—and this Sazarac of the packets is my old captain." He smiled with some twitching pathos about his nervous lips. "Jean—and my lady. Ah, one might have guessed!" He stopped abruptly.

"What is it, Jarvis?" Raoul stared at him. Plainly, he knew nothing of Mademoiselle Lestron's disappearance upon the English bark, to-night slowly beating a way out the Belize Pass to the open gulf.

"Sober," muttered the jester. "That is it. I have vowed to keep sober for her sake from half-past eleven to quite one o'clock . . . it was about the hour of the camellia. Ah—to a staircase fellow in the moonlight!"

His friend laughed curiously, but without understanding. "Every night"—continued Jarvis—"half-past eleven to one. It is a disastrous intermission, however. I have to arrange all my hours, both at the studio and the grog shops. Romance should keep better hours." He sighed: "Love has come like a flame to my darkness, Monsieur! I—who

would have laid my dull head as a stone among the other cobbles for her footstep—and asked nothing! She has gone . . . they whisper, willingly, perhaps, with him. Ah, to play the part of Sazarac—one hour!"

"What are you driving at?" queried Raoul.

"This Sazarac—" muttered Jarvis. "I regret he was not himself. I would have had an affair at the Oaks. Can you imagine me, sober, well-arrayed and speared through the stomach because of a woman? I can not. On second thought, of course not. The time, Monsieur—"

"The time—" De Almonaster started, shot a suspicious glance at the town's jester. But Jarvis was not, apparently, in the conspiracy.

"To put aside my romance and resume my bottle. Damnation!—not yet midnight!" He turned impatiently and gnawed his cuff. "Jean has taken my lady— Eh, well! One's friend is one's friend!"

Raoul watched the mountebank's drawn hungry face at the end of the crowded bar. Then he wandered to the street vestibule. The time for the attack must be approaching.

Somewhere along the west bank of the Mississippi, but a few miles above, the Baratarians must be gathered for the embarkation and the silent drift down-stream. Now that he had time to think soberly of it, Raoul's mind stumbled over the uncertainties of the mad venture. He knew that, about the city, two score of adventurers had armed and awaited secretly to aid the men of Johanness and Nez Coupe from the deep swamp. Seizing the unguarded ship at her moorings, even with the revel about her, would not be difficult. It was the next step when an unfavoring wind might leave the *Seraphine* helpless and adrift in the lower reaches of the river.

De Almonaster watched the faces of his familiars about the ballroom. He had been chaffed enough for his entertainment of the mysterious Sazarac out of the West. But even now the heedless youth were forgetting it. The affair Lafitte was being left to the authorities. The British Colonel Carr had already been courteously rejected from gentlemen's company; the gentry, while most of them had but the merest hearsay about what the missing gamester, Sazarac, might have intended

concerning Mademoiselle Lestron, could not endure Carr's infamous jest at Maspero's gaming-room. They believed, indeed, that the lady had fled of her own accord with the adventurer of the river packet, whom rumor said was Jean Lafitte. Eh, *bien!* It was not the first affair of women for Lafitte . . there was the old story of the governor's lady when the Grand Terre chieftain was at his power.

Raoul saw, in the barroom, a score of tossing glasses upraised to some speech that Bossiere had concluded.

"The *Seraphine,*" a dozen voices shouted, "and to the unknown flag she flies!"

The goblets clinked and broke; the air was a spray of crystal and champagne bubbles; then the laughing groups scattered. But about Captain Bossiere flushed youths clamored on.

"Devil take the dances! Monsieur Girod's banquet awaits us on the *Seraphine.* Let's finish the night there."

And a score of young men took up the cry. De Marigny came crowding to Raoul's side. "Come, there! You—Felix, La Barre—all of

you! You can dance on the decks—but no women, mind! This is a secret session of the Napoleon plot!"

"Yes, and you with us, De Almonaster! You are a third backer of the enterprise since you took over the baroness' interests."

De Almonaster started as the jesting groups closed about him. It was but eleven o'clock! The conspirators across the river would never dream that the gentlemen-adventurers would quit the ball so early! He began to protest as the youths streamed to the street. But one glance at the gold-laced hat of the *Seraphine's* commander now leading the way, and Raoul whirled back and to the courtyard where the servants awaited.

At his low hail his groom came watchfully. "Teton, the ball is breaking up! With all speed the word to the market!"

The octoroon vanished silently. Raoul turned back through the ballroom, his heart beating wildly. He wondered if any saw his perturbation. It was too late to warn the Baratarians that the plans had changed. Already, far across the rue Royale past the cathedral to the Place d'Armes, the aristocrats

were trooping, unarmed, save for their swords of fashion, to encounter unsuspectingly the desperate renegades of Lafitte summoned again from their deep swamp refuges.

"Madness!" the young man muttered. "They are ascending the gangway! The plot is lost! Sazarac will not dare lead his swamp bandits to face the gentlemen of the city already at their banquet seats!"

He lingered irresolutely and then went to the Plaza. If he could find one of the spies who had been all evening watching the course of events at the revel and passing the word, mouth to mouth, out to the upper levee so that the Baratarians across the river might be apprised, he could, even yet, ward off a disastrous failure.

But nowhere did he find one whom he could trust as being in the conspiracy. The groups of idling marketmen had scattered from the stalls.

The crowd on the rue de la Levee, gathered to watch this outdoor revel of the gentlemen-adventurers of the Napoleon ship, was thickening. Along the roped path between these onlookers the gold hat of Captain Bossiere

moved with the gallants cheering in his wake. The gay rosettes and lanterns festooning the ship's rigging reflected upon the yellow flood murmuring along her side.

"I must be seen with them," murmured De Almonaster. "It is a sorry joke. Sazarac dare not face this revel to seize a ship—no, not for all his loves!"

He found his place to the right of Commander Bossiere. De Marigny had started a song of the day among the flushed youths near him:

"Mo l'aimin vous
Comme cochon aimin la boue!"

"Ah!" shouted one, catching sight of De Almonaster; and he translated the doggerel for a young American ensign. "'I love you as a little pig loves the mud!' It must be Raoul, seeing that he loves the Barataria swamps."

Raoul smiled; but his glance was out from the quarter-deck awnings to the yellow, silent flood of the mighty river. Big honest Commander Bossiere, a real seaman oddly out of place among the laughing youths, was unsteady from the toasts he had drunk.

"And there," cried La Barre, "comes another guest who must love the mud, seeing that he frequently rolls in it!"

The guests shouted as another belated one came unsteadily down the carpeted gangway to the deck. Jarvis, it was, the town's profligate, whose hour's tribute to his lady had turned to Bacchus promptly with the clock. The first Bohemian of the French Quarter raised his hand. In it was a staff with folded colors. And behind him marched six grim fellows in tarpaulin hats, red shirts and the new tight pants of the period, cutlassed and pistoled, who, without word, took position along the rail, and came to a salute as Jarvis bawled a mocking order.

The flushed aristocrats stared, then cheered, when the mummer pirates broke to hoarse song, a Creole air of the day:

"Di tems M'sieu Lafitte,
Ye to menin monde a la baguette—"

The guests seized it in glee. Another gibe at the smiling Count de Almonaster.

"'In the days of Lafitte the world was straight as a switch,'" translated De Marigny

for the benefit of a young American lieutenant, "and, look you, Jarvis unfolds the pirate's flag. Another crack at Raoul's new friend—the famous Sazarac!"

For the artist, as his amateur buccaneers roared their chantey, shook free the colors, and planted the staff by Bossiere's table. A black banner upon which was a grotesque skull and cross-bones. Even Bossiere was convulsed with laughter at the grimacing Jarvis's antics. Then he uprose, glass in hand.

"Well, then, to the buccaneers, my good Jarvis! The old cry: 'A-Barataria! A-Barataria!'" And then the old seaman seemed to stare curiously at the nearest of the pirate mummers. Raoul's eye was on him; the young man caught a covert glance from Alderman Dominique. But the shouting tables saw nothing wrong. De Marigny was up and roaring.

"A flag! A flag, for the *Seraphine!* A royal jest for Bonaparte when we scale the cliffs of St. Helena, hale him to sea, and run up the old colors of the free rovers! Ho, Jarvis, this is a hit!"

A group was about the artist, dragging him

to a wine cask to mount and speak. But suddenly a new uproar burst from them all. One of the red-shirted masqueraders had sprung to the rail, seizing the black flag to wave it as he ran. And his song burst forth—there seemed some new, warning accent to the thing:

"Di tems M'sieu Lafitte—"

Above the hubbub, De Almonaster's nervous senses caught a sound over the rail. His covert glance to the yellow river showed a deeper shadow, then the flash of oars. He found Alderman Dominique staring at him hastily. Then, turning, he heard bare feet pattering along the wooden slope of the levee. But even when the first of a curious crew appeared at the gangway among the crowding servants, hustling them aside, the revelers on the deck did no more than roar appreciatively.

"Ho, Jarvis! More of your jesting! Faith, how many—"

Then De Marigny stopped. Gorgio, the crayfish seller, was unwarping a mooring line that held the *Seraphine* in the tide. And a

huge mulatto leaped from rail to deck; there came the flash of a cutlass from another figure.

"De Almonaster!" cried La Barre, "that is your hostler, Teton! This is not good taste!"

And suddenly, with a roar, a score of burly forms rushed the rail and swept among the guests. Forward came a rattle of poles and blocks. A shouted order from old Johanness of the swamp; and the bow of the clipper was sheering off the wharf. A startled silence fell. The richly-appareled gentlemen were staring as the *Seraphine's* bow caught the slow current. De Almonaster grasped Dominique in turn.

"They are here!"

The two caught sight of a tall cloaked figure that had sprung to the quarter-deck and turned calmly to watch the mêlée. Captain Bossiere had leaped up shouting:

"Lafitte! 'Pon my soul—the bandit!"

Then from the barefooted fellows arose the old cry of a decade agone:

"A-Barataria! A-Barataria!"

"Off with them!" roared old Bohon, "to the work, bullies!"

The elegant young De Marigny, in his evening clothes of broadcloth and silk stockings, was lifted and hurled over the rail to the muddy levee. A sword flashed in Villeret's hand, and he was seized and thrown from the deck. La Barre sprang to the shrouds with a warning cry to the servants, but he, too, was propelled off. And with yells and laughter the Baratarians rushed upon the retreating guests of the Napoleon ship. Overpowered, borne back, the struggling gallants fought, but one by one the brawny hunters and fishermen of the *chenieres* threw them from rail and deck. Tables were overturned, the awning poles broken, lanterns flared up smokily; and over the battle the one-time commander of the *Black Petral* watched calmly. The pressure brought De Almonaster almost against him.

"Jean!" he whispered: "you dared, then?"

But a hand clutched frantically at Raoul's sleeve. De La Vergne was borne past in the embrace of two lusty fellows. "*A moi!*" cried the youth. "Raoul, we are attacked!"

"*Nom de Dieu!*" muttered Raoul. "Nez Coupe, do not injure him!"

"Over with him!"

There was a splash in the batture mud. The ship was swinging wide in the river flood. Jarvis came reeling aft, staring back at his late fellow-guests and bon-vivants. Already ahead came the snap of a loosened jib. Johanness, the bo'sun, was shouting orders to fellows who were manning the fore-rigging. At the wheel stood Beluche, one-time admiral of Cartagena, looking up to the break of the canvas. And even as De Almonaster gasped to see how swiftly the plotters had worked, each to an appointed station, the last of the youth and chivalry of La Nouvelle Orleans went over the side to the levee mud.

Save one. Jarvis, the wit, had seized his hand-painted Jolly Roger and shook it toward the city. Then bewilderedly he looked again at Lafitte.

"Jean! What is this jest! What possessed my mummers that they fell upon Bossiere and the lot? And Johanness, and Beluche—*nom de Dieu!* There is old Slit-Nose that I have not seen in ten years! And Black Mike, the renegade! And Gorgio, whom I consulted for my maskers!"

"Next time you seek to amuse the gentry of New Orleans," cried Johanness, "do not allow Gorgio to choose your players!"

"Jarvis," said Lafitte, "I did not wish you here. Nor Dominique, the alderman. The rest are with me—to sea again."

"A ship!" shouted Jarvis, "I howled for a ship! Did you think I would miss this chance? Ho, Dominique, we are seized!—you have been too respectable the last ten years, and I, too bored! To sea it is, then!"

The lap of the tide was coming smartly against the clipper's side as the topsails broke out against the starry night. De Almonaster was staring back doubtfully at the lights of the Place d'Armes. Faint shouts and imprecations came as the gallants were being poled and fished from the dirty levee-water by their servants and fellow-townsmen. A fire bell began to ring, the whistle of a steam-boat started up the river past the old Fort St. Louis. Then the boom of an alarm gun above the distant shouts and maledictions.

Jarvis seized a bottle of cognac from the table.

"*Mo l'aimin vous comme cochon*—Eh? Ah,

the little pigs are in the mud! The silken hose of a De Marigny—the waistcoat of a De La Vergne!"

He stopped oddly and approached the master of the *Seraphine*.

"It might be of interest, Monsieur Sazarac, why I am here, why my fat friend, Dominique, is here? Beluche, old Slit-Nose; Bohon and Black Mike? Indeed, villains whom I had thought long since hanged!"

"My good Jarvis, I wish you were ashore—you and the councilor at least. This is a serious venture, sir—well enough for my old fellows who have no more than their skins to lose, and none value that. But you—"

"I was the first to howl for a ship," drawled Jarvis. "But, curse me, if I can imagine Black Mike and Bohon to the rescue of Napoleon!"

"We are to the rescue of the English lady," said the master calmly.

The painter stared at him: "Why, I thought she—you—she did not flee with you after all? I may see her again?"

"It lies with the winds of chance. You are set on a mad venture, sir."

Jarvis poured him more drink unsteadily.

His captain stood frowning at the long tables of the banquet deck. Already along them wild spirits of the crew were cracking bottles and making merry over the disordered feast which had been spread for the gentlemen-adventurers of New Orleans. Among them Johanness, the bo'sun; Admiral Beluche with his gold cockade, and other leaders of old days were laboring to restore discipline. De Almonaster watched the plundering and the shouting with a sudden curious apprehension. The older men were working the ship safely in the broad reaches of the river on a following wind, but the others hardly gave way before the under-officers.

"Napoleon!" shouted John Crackley, the English deserter. "Eh, bullies, I say a fat merchantman o' Spain, up from Panama, will make us all sing differently!"

"You hear?" muttered De Almonaster. "What they are thinking—with Lafitte in command?"

"They are pledged to the rescue of Mademoiselle Lestron from the *Genaron*," said Lafitte sharply. "Beluche, get among them again! Send them to the fo'cas'le, all who are not engaged in duty."

"The seas are wide," mused Jarvis. "And far to their secret places. I wonder, now, Monsieur Sazarac, what a lady might think of me if she saw me once quite clean, well-shaven—and with my new waistcoat?"

"Eh? What is this jesting?" Lafitte turned to him from his grave scrutiny of the rioters among the wine-strewn tables. The painter, however, had found an uncertain way to the taffrail. There he waved a bottle at the distant lights of the city. A single alarum gun from a man o' war sounded above the easy break of the water on the schooner's bows.

"Eh, well!" bawled the town's jester suddenly. "Ho, slimy gallants! Ho, drenched blades o' the opera!—to-morrow, to celebrate the sailing of the Napoleon ship there will be such a scrubbing and hanging forth of furbelows and ribbons as will keep the house mammies busied for a week! Who is in the mud, now—John Jarvis? *Mo l' aimin vous comme cochon—!*"

But after the laughter that followed him the author of it went aside to stare ahead into the dark. De Almonaster found him so, his pallor heightened, his cheeks twitching. The mimic seemed shaken with a fear as he

watched the bloom of shadowy sail drawing him on to unknown venture.

"I am to see her, Monsieur—and she, me?" he said plaintively.

"Monsieur Sazarac will rescue her by force if needs be, John."

The other nodded slowly: "Yes—Sazarac, always—Sazarac. Ah, name o' God:—to play one hour! To be the *poseur*—to have the lover's gesture, the pretty speech; and to tell men: 'Go there!—Come here!'—with a mere glance that they obey! Think of it! A Sazarac . . . Come, Monsieur, the cognac. It is the refuge, the adventure—and the dream. In the bottle I am Lord Sazarac—I swagger, I rescue—I love." He twitched his friend's sleeve dolefully: "She must not see me—she must never see me . . . I am the ragged ghost out in the shadows, Monsieur—where her eyes can not follow." He turned away, the sardonic mood quite shaken from him. "Below—the emperor's chair, for Sazarac. The lady will come—for Sazarac. Sazarac!—who does not exist save in her dreams! . . Why should I not play Sazarac for her? What right has Jean Lafitte to this gallant, rescuing rôle before her eyes?"

CHAPTER IX

A QUESTION OF DIPLOMACY

A FAMOUS run it was that day when the low black clipper, *Seraphine,* made the last broad reaches of the mighty Mississippi on a following wind, and the lookout picked up the myriad whirls of sea-birds over the outlying march points of the Pass L'Outre.

"A famous breeze for clearing," roared Johanness, at the wheel, "see the old bullies for'ard crowding the rail for a sight o' blue water. Aye, old Slit-Nose must crawl out her very jib-stays where the good wind will snuff out the stink of otter and mink pelts from his pantaloons! A chantey, there, mates!—ye are at sea again, with an oak bottom under, and the Captain Jean in command!"

They had been a roaring, unruly lot forward until Beluche, as second officer, with Bohon and Nez Coupe, had brought discipline, at times with the threat of fist or mar-

linspike. The watches were picked and the mess organized, and the desultory plundering of stores and the finery left in disorder by the gentlemen crew of the Napoleon ship was sternly stopped. Indeed, three fellows who had a set-to with the rum at once, were in the brig by nightfall; and a trio more had broken heads. But when the Captain Jean, with Monsieur de Almonaster and Dominique, went on inspection during the second watch, they were greeted with cheerful and subdued respect.

"You have fetched them up well, sir," commented Lafitte to the one-time admiral of Cartagena, who had abandoned his service of Colombian privateering against the ships of Spain, for this venture: "And keep them in hand. They are sailormen, all—and we, the officers."

The former second officer of the *Black Petral* muttered to his chief.

"There be sixty-four in all. Some old artillerymen of Jackson's day at Chalmette; some fo'cast'le lads who've sailed wi' David Porter and wi' Decatur against the Tripolitans; some escaped Britishers from press

A Paramount Picture.

Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea.

THE PIRATES DEFY THE SPANISH MAN O' WAR.

gangs—and there be a score of our old fellows, Jean. Men of Grand Terre, and of Galveston Island, some wi' the president's pardon —some not."

The gaunt, shifty-eyed John Crackley, stepped from the line. "We have made bold to ask, sir—under what flag this ship—"

A rumble of laughter stopped him. Aft, by the captain's companion, hung a stiff, painted banner already fraying in the gale. And by it, fast asleep, sprawled the artist-jester who had painted the thing to amuse the city of the Creoles.

But Lafitte stopped the levity. "We shall attend to that. We are on a venture the end of which will be disclosed to you in due time."

But when he had dismissed them to quarters, old Beluche voiced his doubts. "Not a ruffian of them all but thinks we are privateering again. As to Napoleon, they would roar with laughter; and as to this rescue of the English woman, well—you can lead them to that, but it is plunder that is in their minds."

The chief looked thoughtfully at De Almonaster. When they sat again over their

brandy and coffee in the tapestried luxury of the emperor's suite, the younger man adverted to it.

"We have the excuse, sir, that Mademoiselle Lestron was unlawfully seized out of the city. Only violent action could save her. She must explain the mystery of her abduction to clear us with the admiralties—"

"The watch already reports a vessel making south," grunted Beluche. "And the *Genaron* will be a clumsy lout in weather that this clipper loves. The mists kept the Englishman hid in the passes, but out to sea we can pick him up at our pleasure."

Old Dominique twirled his thumbs upon his stomach. He had declined to take any active part in the ship's hurried organization, pleading his gout and corpulence, but they had gibed him well.

"If trouble comes of it—as it will," grinned Beluche sourly, "you will still be the worthy councilor of New Orleans, eh? Pummeled aboard and off against your will! Ho, Dominique!"

"And you may yet need an honest councilor to plead your cause," retorted Dominique.

"And you get yourselves into admiralty court, the bigwigs will be hard to convince this is not open lawless piracy. The Captain Jean's love-affairs—eh, well! Can you get an advocate to speak them to the magistrates of Jamaica, or even in Charleston or New York!"

A lanky tousled form came reeling under the rocking cabin lamp.

"A magistrate!" chuckled Jarvis, "the rum, old gabbler—that is the prime magistrate! Since when did Dominique mewl of the laws?"

"Be still, Jarvis!" said Lafitte, "this is a serious council. The lady of the *Genaron* is to be rescued—without violence if we may. After that—"

"Bonaparte!" cried Raoul eagerly, "that is our one chance for fame, for fortune and for extenuation! The exiled emperor slipped from under their noses and to sea on the fastest clipper that Yankee brains ever devised!"

"And after that, pray?" mumbled old Dominique.

They were silent. The light breeze lifted and swung the silken curtains of the ship Napoleon; the wines lapped slowly in the rich

glass and silver. Jarvis looked about at the polished teak, the heavily carpeted floors; he shook his head.

"This is a dream," he muttered, "and still—we must awaken! After Napoleon—when our threescore musketmen have come scrambling up the St. Helena crags, filched the emperor from their snoozing guards and cutlassed a way to sea again—what then?"

"Old Bossiere, Monsieur Girod, and the other spirits of this venture, before we seized the ship, had every point worked out," explained De Almonaster. "Even the plans of the island and the English lookouts. Even block and tackle and chair to hoist the emperor from out the St. Helena cliffs to our waiting longboats if needful. Doctor Antomarchi, Napoleon's own physician, and Marshal Bertrand, his friend in exile, are aware of our purpose and expectant. Everything is cared for—it is only for us to put through what the gentry of New Orleans had plotted."

"Except," mused Jarvis, "the lady who once looked back at me from the coach . . and threescore cutthroats brawling on these decks!"

The Captain Jean looked gravely off to the shimmering sea. Dominique sighed. "Ah, yes!—after Napoleon—what?"

"Hum—" continued Jarvis, and reached for a decanter. "The mayor always said I would yet be hanged if I did not renounce the company of certain pot-house scalawags. If I am to be hanged, I desire it for the lady who inspired me to the new waistcoat, and not for the emperor of the French."

"We must be serious," retorted Raoul. "We have stolen a ship. We are on the sea with as parlous a gang of freebooters as there is yet unhung. To bring the *Seraphine* sedately into port again, with Napoleon as our guest, and placate Washington for the exploit, is a task for diplomats!"

The giant, Johanness, had swung to the council table with the easy familiarity of the old privateering days. "Devil take the diplomats! We might as well run up Jarvis's hand-painted black flag and cut to it, as far as hoping for pardon from the admiralties!"

"Gentlemen, the future of you all has been a concern to my mind," said Lafitte gravely. And as he was speaking on, there came a hail

from the forward lookout; and then Beluche, the deck officer, at the companionway.

"A ship's light, sir! Sou' by east, lying out o' the wind!"

"She is not within hailing?" The master started to his feet.

"No, sir. And we have little air to come up with. But the longboats, sir! The thing might be done in a trice this very night, unless she undertakes to repel our parley!"

"She will hardly give in to our demands." Lafitte followed to the quarter-rail. The twinkle of the stranger showed through the moonlight. But both ships were lying in the great outrush of the Mississippi waters though many miles from the sight of land.

"Lay to, sir, and keep her in eye. We can do nothing without a bit of wind. We shall request the restoration of Mademoiselle Lestron peaceably before we consider boarding the bark." The master turned below again.

Johanness went forward grumbling. The light of battle was in his eye. Off this pass he had taken his last Spaniard fifteen years ago with eighty thousand dollars to be divided among his crew at the Grand Terre fort of

the buccaneers which was not a day's sail westward on the Louisiana coast. And the party in the emperor's cabin heard a hoarse shout from the fo'cas'le hood.

"A ship, bullies! And we lay here with the old itch to be alongside! What do the gentlemen aft propose for her, eh—mates?"

Beluche showered imprecations upon the speaker. There was a yell or two, then silence. Presently the admiral came aft under the limp hang of the *Seraphine's* snowy new canvas.

"There are some hardheads, sir. Already they are dicing it for the first choice o' plunder from the *Genaron.* The woman, they agree, is yours!"

"Do they think," retorted Lafitte sternly, "that this is the time of Morgan come again?"

The silence grew upon them all. Dominique sighed once more. "The English woman —if it was not for the affair of the English woman, we could give a wide berth to everything until this ship and crew had found themselves."

"They will now—this coming day!" said the commander. "I am Lafitte again—not Mon-

sieur Sazarac! Irons, and then the yard-arm for the first fellow who disputes my will. The older heads will not needs be told. The English woman first—after that, as it is Monsieur de Almonaster's honor to his fellow-citizens of Louisiana—for Bonaparte. And then—"

"The seas are wide," grimaced Jarvis with a look at the master which drew, in turn, a glance of impenetrable reserve.

Before the gentlemen of the quarter-deck had retired, the painter of the *Vieux Carre* drew De Almonaster's arm through his and strolled the rail.

"Tell me, Monsieur Raoul—as you are in his confidence—does my captain love the English woman?"

"It appears that he loves the English woman," retorted Raoul irritatedly, for the jester's mood had been a gibe and a leer from the moment of his first footstep on the schooner's deck.

"Ah!" shrugged Jarvis, "and if she loves in turn, it must be Sazarac of the packets! Now, behold me, Raoul? In my ragged heart could I hold love for anything except the bottle?"

"You!" Raoul laughed shortly. "What is in your ragged heart, John?"

"It is like this—" complained the artist. "Back in my studio, my assistant, Monsieur Audubon, is always painting birds in his odd hours. He paints them so amazingly that my cat died of indigestion, from gazing upon them. It is so with my love and my ragged heart . . . it must be a Sazarac who can play the rescuing hero rôle. Now, Monsieur de Almonaster, assist me to be very drunk before I go to bed."

CHAPTER X

THE LONG CHASE

AT DAWN the *Seraphine* lay in a flat pink sea, with, not a mile to the eastward, the dingy moil of the Mississippi outpour still visible. The canvas hung wet and limp. The idle steersman listened to Beluche's impatient comments as he held the glass off to the growing light.

"Beggar's luck! The river drift has been with her. She is all but tops'l down with some capful of wind that we never saw!"

"Wi' the sun," growled Nez Coupe, "we shall find our breeze."

"Yes, but this matter can not wait. Some Yankee clipper may put out on our trail! We can not tell what is brewing after this affair."

De Almonaster and the captain joined them before breakfast. True, a topsail breeze came with the sun, and the *Seraphine* began to draw out of the detaining eddies of the delta

drift. The gentlemen had no more than settled to their morning coffee when the monotonous cry of the lookout was repeated. Beluche came with his report.

"The stranger has picked a better wind, sir, and has come about, making sou'west, and running fair."

"Good! She will not make the Floridas then and draw us into the path of the traffic. It will be a good ship to-day that we do not haul up with."

"I have ordered the chase guns shotted," muttered the admiral. "It may take a carronade across her bows to make her lay to. Eh, *bien!* You will see old eyes shine as they take to the lanyard!"

De Almonaster cried out exultantly when he followed to the deck. The first poke of the breeze laid the good ship smartly over, and the snap of the answering canvas drew a shout from the crew.

"Every bully of them out to see!" cried Raoul. "A lot of schoolboys minded to rob an orchard! The first eighteen-pounder let go will be music to old ears, Monsieur!"

"And they may dance on air to it, after-

ward." Lafitte turned quietly to the younger man. "I have had a sleepless night, Monsieur de Almonaster. It appears to be largely yourself. The rest carried in irons to Charleston when the inevitable happens, will not matter, but you—your position, your good name and fortune—"

Raoul snapped his fingers laughingly. "I came for this—a true exploit, and with you, sir—whatever befalls afterward!"

"I have my plans considered," said the captain calmly. "We will not escape in the end. When that hour comes, you shall be my prisoner."

"I, Monsieur?"

"I seized you upon this ship against your will. It was no affair of yours but of Jean Lafitte's."

"But *nom de Dieu!* I was the first to propose it!"

"That is why I shall save you." He bowed enigmatically. "And Jarvis, the fool. The rest—well, in the end, I must answer. First to these lawless spirits who believe absolutely that I am turning pirate again. Next to the admiralty courts. America, Great Britain"—he shrugged—"it will be of no consequence."

De Almonaster watched the face of the exile who had been the enigma of diplomats of Britain and generals of the United States but seven years back when he shook the dice between them for the province of Louisiana, and gave back a captain's commission in the Royal Navy to fight for the puling Republic of the West. Slowly the younger man was guessing. To rescue the woman whom he loved meant but to tear the mask from his own face—to stand before her—Jean Lafitte, the last pirate chieftain of the gulf—a proscribed outlaw, hunted by the navies of the world, dragged out of his obscurity of peace to face a ring of enemies.

"You are my prisoner, sir—when the end comes," he said quietly.

Raoul stirred, and then turned from this implacable will. Below he came upon John Jarvis shaking the sleep from his swollen eyes.

"I have been forward," grunted the painter. "There is more hubbub than a ladies' picnic. Bohon and Johanness can not keep the dogs from howling. Old fellows who have been in the business before are scouring up rusty dirks, pistols that have molded ten years in

muskrat trappers' camps—very quiet, the older heads, but winking wisely. They whisper that Lafitte is a wise fox to pretend to an affair of women when he knows of the fat prizes helpless, unsuspecting, in the trade routes."

"They are in for an awakening, Jarvis. He does not mean that."

"I took them a bucket o' grog," muttered the other. "The gimcrack admiral roundly cursed me for upsetting his discipline, but the bullies are ready to elect me captain, if Saz-a-rac is too finicky in tastes."

Raoul laughed wonderingly. "The Captain Sazarac ordains that you and I are to be prisoners!—to save our necks if the venture fails. And our good names, as well, in the eyes of Mademoiselle Lestron of Quebec."

"He can consider what he wishes and be damned. I am a free man—I will boast to the lady of the necks I have slit, which—God knows is none! I will play the fool for her, the thief for her—I will stretch rope for her . . . and I never saw her but one time. She looked back and laughed—there was old John Jarvis, very drunken in the broad day, hang-

ing to a lamp-post, his stock behind his ear, and a bottle sticking from his coat. A proud Tory lady of the Canadas, filled with soft sweet laughter at John, the jester."

Raoul looked keenly at the impassive face of the wit. "Have a care. Who was ever your friend in the old days, but Jean? You and I diligently must aid his plan. It is due him, Monsieur. He would be an honest gentleman in this, at least."

"Well, a drink, now—and I will play the fool for any one." Jarvis arose: "Come, I hear the bo'sun's whistle. They are calling the bullies up for some matter."

Johanness had tumbled the watches out and along the port rail, when the two came behind Lafitte who was addressing the straggling lines. There was much unsteady peering and bending; and then reprimanding growls from the older dogs to the ones who had never sailed with the Grande Terre privateers in the old days.

"Stow that talk! The captain speaks!"

"Silence, there!" roared Beluche, "and a man mutters he gets the cat! This is a ship, mind you—not a drinking bout!"

Lafitte raised his hand:

"First, men—I have already told you of the object of this venture, which has, for the end, the rescue of the Emperor Bonaparte from St. Helena. That, alone, will keep us busied for some months; but I do not say there will be nothing done of profit to you all, in the meantime, if it comes our way—"

There was a yell subsiding to a grumble.

"You all know the war that is on between Spain and her provinces of New Granada and along the Caribbean; Mr. Beluche has assured you of the chances there, and he has letters of marque from the Republic of Cartagena that allow us a show of legality—"

There was another murmur. "Cartagena? It has been sacked and burned five years by the viceroy! I was one who got away—singed, it is true, but whole-skinned, which was better than most!"

Lafitte turned to him patiently: "Then you know, John Crackley; and can not love the Spaniards."

"No more do I! But there are English ships about the Indies easier of picking. The Spaniards are armed and watchful against just

such as we. I vote east'ard, and picking up a fat Indiaman—or anything that we can haul down."

There was a murmur, some in approval, some impatiently. The captain glanced down the line of red-burned and bronzed faces—shaggy men,—all in green and red shirts, barefooted or rough-booted; with here and there a blue-eyed Irish lad, a deserting Spaniard or Portuguese—he felt now, that the old magic of his name could not be trusted too far with them. On shore they would flock to him loyally, but at sea, without papers or purpose, it would be a strong will that held them to order.

"The English," went on Lafitte sternly, "are now the friends of the United States. Even now, in Washington, they report that never were relations so good as under the President Monroe—"

"Bah," grunted Crackley, "I am not a sea-lawyer! Eh, mateys?"

"Silence!" thundered Lafitte.

De Almonaster, by the rail, watched curiously. The line of reluctant privateers edged nervously. Behind the captain stood

Beluche and old Dominique and Nez Coupe. Old Johanness, grim and sullen, stood rubbing his chin doubtfully. The older sailors said nothing; it was the younger element, deserters, renegades of many sort picked up in New Orleans' drinking shops—rapscallions who had nothing to lose nor flag to respect, who were dangerous.

"Enough!" went on Lafitte. "Another word, and then Johanness will dismiss you. But first, take your warning—I am Captain Sazarac of the *Seraphine*. In her own good time the ship will fly a flag—and that is the business of wiser heads than yours! And now, as to that ship we are overhauling—it is a matter of private business in this case. A lady is to be taken off. If an affray must come you are to fight the guns or board exactly as ordered, and cease when ordered. And when once the lady from the *Genaron* is put upon this ship, she is to be treated with absolute respect from you all. More than that—complete silence. She is not to know upon what mission this ship is bound, nor who is her commander."

There was an astonished silence. The men

craned and stared. Johanness nodded truculently to them. Beluche turned to thunder:

"You have heard, now! Then be warned!—and obey!"

Johanness, catching his eye, dismissed the crew. Back once more by the steersman, old Dominique sighed.

"We have a handful. But I can guess their stares. The Captain Lafitte defending the English because, forsooth, they are friendly with the Americans! It is enough to open old eyes! Half these renegades have smarted in British press-gangs, and the rest—well, sirs, it puzzles even our old fellows!"

"It well may. Lafitte's return dazzled them at first, and they were keen to be at anything for him; but now some of them are wondering where the profits lie for broken bones and wet skins."

"They glower, too, at this young gentleman of the rue Royale—for they deem him part owner of the *Seraphine,* and holding back the captain from any too unlawful a venture. And Jarvis, the idler, goes among them with his jests and ruffles their feelings."

Johanness, the bo'sun, had come aft, cock-

ing an eye aloft at the sail-spread; he had heard the talk and growled:

"A good fight—that's what these hearties need—blood let from some of the youngsters, and a man or two to the sharks! Aye, and we keep on fetching yon hull above the water as we've done the past five hours and there'll be one."

"Captain Lafitte does not desire an encounter."

"Burke and the other deserting Irisher say the *Genaron* mounts two long sixes and a twelve-pounder; and below hatches, stuffed with arms, which, it was given out, are going to New Granada for Simon Bolivar's revolt."

"Aye, well! I little think she'll fight. The *Seraphine* will flay her in an hour—we carry pretty bat'ries, gentlemen, as ever a privateer could wish! Twelve twenty-four-pound carronades and the two long nines! She was made for us, eh, Beluche?"

"Go, Johanness—see how you address me!"

"Bah! Admiral! Admiral of a nimcompoop republic which even now the Spanish king's ships are strangling! I would not give a swing for your papers!"

"Hold, now! I am the second on the *Seraphine,* and you—bo'sun, old dog!"

"And I, Johanness, old bully! Every one is getting too nice for old memories! Ho, Jean, himself—"

Then he was still, for Jean himself approached. A glint of humor was in the eye that rested on the two old brawlers. Dominique sighed; he well wished himself back on the aldermanic seat of New Orleans.

"Johanness, go you and set the royals—the fellow yonder is sailing better than we dreamed. He seems to have a slant of wind that only comes to us in puffs. Go, now—and you, Beluche, have a care to the steersman. Night will drop on us ere we know."

Dominique grinned as the twain departed with alacrity. To Raoul he nodded wisely. "He will fetch them a turn, sir! But we never will pick up the *Genaron* this day!"

The worthy alderman proved right enough, for the wind slipped to uncertain streaks near sundown, and in the last glimmer of dusk the pursued and pursuer lay limp and adrift on the warm heave of the gulf. The crew had grown strangely quiet. Jarvis, lolling at the

quarter-rail, spat at a following shark, then touched the Count de Almonaster upon the sleeve. He pointed at the fugitive ship to the southward.

"She must know she is pursued. She is making straight for Yucatan—she will crawl under the Spaniards' guns at some river's mouth, and yell to Heaven that old days have come again in the gulf and the buccaneers are on the tail of the traffic. The crew has decided that she should be scuttled, and every mouth on her closed ere she can tell that Lafitte is at sea again!"

"What nonsense! You know the purpose of this ship as well as I."

"The devil take me, though, if I know her end."

"I say that, in honor, the captain will land the lady of the *Genaron* in some port of the Indies where she can regain her countrymen—"

"Ah, what nicety! He will find her a suitable duenna and then he will venture that he loves her—"

"That is his affair," broke in Raoul shortly.

"And if I was a tall somber gentleman

called Sazarac—and I quarreled on a staircase about a lady, after winning her on an ace of hearts; and I had a good ship and a free-rolling crew with fingers that fair itched for the bullion out of Mexico—do you think she would ever see port again, or the face of a man to love again, save mine? Jarvis has dreamed, Monsieur—Jarvis in a brown smock among his paint pots . . . if he was a Sazarac, quick with the rapier, ready with the dueling pistol—a figure for a lady's eye, and not the ghost of a man who might have been. You recall, Monsieur," he went on subduedly, "the time I considered challenging Pierre Foret? My seconds shut me in a room to practising pistoling. After two days' labor I couldn't hit the window! Monsieur Foret found a polite way to decline meeting me. . . . You recall how the town laughed, my friend? It left a hole in my ragged heart."

"Come—come!" said Raoul hurriedly. "No more of this! Affairs are getting ominous enough among us. You had best keep apart from the crew, Jarvis. You have been setting them on to fury with tales of the gold the *Genaron* carries. You know there is no truth to it!"

"I was fair to split my sides laughing over the murdering humor it put them in! That and the drink I got among them to start their boasting."

"The devil take you! I should report this to the captain," fumed De Almonaster. "You are a trouble-maker!"

"I must be amused," yawned Jarvis, "for in the end, I hang. But first I should like to hang a picture in the *Cabildo* for the city councilors to muse over. It would be the last pirate of the gulf making wry faces as the Captain Lafitte teaches him knitting. If I could be this Sazarac for one day, Monsieur—one day, a man, and not a mountebank. How is it done, Monsieur Raoul?—I would like to learn the part, merely for a day."

He pulled his dirty velvet cap over one ear, rubbed the unshaven pallor of his cheek, and smiled plaintively. At dinner the gentlemen found him asleep in the tapestried suite, his ragged boots upon the pillows of the bed which had been designed for Bonaparte.

CHAPTER XI

THE LADY OF THE GENARON

And again, that night the hawk missed its prey. Even as the chiefs were conferring as to what trusted fellows should man the long-boats for a surprise upon the becalmed bark there came a stir out of the east that gave her chance to elude the *Seraphine*. But at once Beluche had his sailormen aloft; and with royals and staysails set the schooner lay to the course where the merchantman was last reported.

"If we can not board before to-morrow," grumbled Nez Coupe, "there will be the question of gunning her. I smell sailors' weather coming."

"There will have to be some action. Last night some rascals plundered the steward's stores," said Bohon, now on the watch. "Dainties o' food and drink meant for the gentlemen o' New Orleans on their quest for

Bonaparte have been guzzled by shrimp fishers o' the city markets!"

Indeed, the watching eyes of all the ship's officers were upon the restless spirit growing forward. It was a relief, when, after the breeze died fitfully near midnight, a hail from the lookout brought every one out upstanding.

"There—abaft our beam! She hangs flat, and the currents are bearing us past her bow!" Bohon pointed to the starlight: "Your *Genaron,* my Captain!"

The party on the quarter-deck was watching what only a seaman's eyes could make out against the night; when, on the silence, came the jarring burst of a gun. The flash leaped from the *Seraphine's* side, and by it they saw three figures retreating from the port carronade.

A hoarse cheer from the forecastle companionway greeted Beluche as he reached the gun. The crew had crowded up to watch the shot. The *Genaron* lay not four hundred yards distant, coming up on the soft air, her canvas already beginning to rattle. Then a musket-shot broke from one of the *Seraphine's* taunting outlaws.

Beluche had come upon Nez Coupe already panting from his encounter with the fellows forward.

"The scoundrels let go with the port twenty-four-pounder," roared the gunner. "Against all orders! Bohon was on watch, but some of 'em crawled to the gun. Aye, Crackley it was, and Burke—they'll smart for this! Death to the man who fired the shot!"

"The captain is arousing," growled Beluche. "Among 'em, Split-Nose—and you, Johanness! Dogs' work—fair mutiny!"

The gunner and the bo'sun were among the yelling villains sending them below when Lafitte appeared. The older men had not had part in the fracas. When the officers reached the spot the deck was black with combatants. Crackley staggered out of the press with a bleeding head.

"Lay off," he yelled. "It was but a joke! Black Mike swore we could not rake her, and Budge said we could cut her main mast!"

"Aye, and she came around!" shouted Burke, the Irish deserter. "No stomach for a drubbing! I told ye it needed action, mates. Once on that ship and I slit the mate's neck for the lashin's he gave me aboard her!"

"Who fired that gun, sirs?" queried Lafitte of his deck watch. "He shall go in irons for it. He shall face trial for his life to-morrow!"

"It was a rough prank, sir!" gasped Nez Coupe. "All against orders, which were to lie on her quarter and hold till daylight."

"Turn out the men—all." Lafitte stood with folded arms as the crew poured forth. They were quiet now. A young fellow laughed scaredly. The older men were muttering against the disorder.

Then, on the hush, came a shout. Jarvis, reeling from a coil of cordage by the companion-hood, pointed to the shadowy bulk of the English ship slowly heaving on the seas. With a grinding, tearing crash, her main mast was heeling down through her shrouds. The *Seraphine's* crew howled.

"Silence!" thundered Lafitte.

"A hit—a marvelous shot!" chuckled Jarvis, rubbing his hands.

The chief watched him covertly. Beluche was bringing the *Seraphine* to under the quarter of the disabled bark. Then his hail came from the rail. There was no answer from the black bulk out on the moonlit waters.

Old Dominique nudged De Almonaster in the ribs. "There will be blood over this. The captain is deadly silent. It was so I watched him call a mutineer from our ranks on *La Cheniere* and shoot him through the heart. He will swing Crackley and Burke, or—"

There came a shout from the English vessel. Men were already struggling there to cut away the pounding mast and wreckage.

"What is this villainy, sir?" a voice rasped: "Against His Majesty's ship in times of peace? Who are you, sir?"

De Almonaster could now make out the white gown of a woman among the group by the *Genaron's* wheel—and his heart beat quicker. The crew of the *Seraphine* was silent. Every soul knew that the test had come: would Lafitte, the pirate, betray his identity?

"What, sir—are you?" the voice continued. "We are a lawful ship out to Porto Bello—the *Genaron,* Captain Richards, commanding. And I add, for this outrage, you shall make account!"

Lafitte glanced to his steersman ere he answered. The clipper sheered off or she would have raked the bark's starboard counter.

"Sir," he said quietly, "it is of no matter who we are. Our errand will speak for itself. Our colors when it suits us. The errand—"

A shout broke from the *Genaron's* crew. "The *Seraphine!* The Yankee clipper! Aye, the Napoleon ship—I'd know her in a thousand!"

The English captain blustered on, as his deck officers shouted to the men to clear away the grinding rigging overside. Lafitte listened quietly, and when a pause came, he spoke.

"The *Seraphine,* sir—then it is. Her present object is to demand the lady who is unlawfully detained upon your ship. You know the circumstances of Miss Lestron's detention. I demand that she be placed at once at our disposal."

There was an astounded silence on the bark. Then a woman's cry of joyful amazement. "The Americans!"

The skipper's voice answered: "We can not recognize this demand, sir—whoever you are. And who is in command?"

"I demand," retorted the chief, "the person of Miss Lestron at once delivered on board this ship."

"And I refuse—"

"The affair is yours. Beluche, sir!" He turned to his silent men who clustered along the rail. "Lay the boats along for boarding. You, Bohou, see to the gun crews!"

There was a howl of joyful surprise among the ruffians, a scattering right and left, under the yeoman's instant call, a clattering of knives and pistols. Again the commander turned calmly to the *Genaron*.

"You are ready for action, sir? You shall have it!"

But the merchantman was not as was easily seen. Her crew became a disorderly pack scattering from the amidship wreckage. The hammering of the fallen mast in the seas alone showed their futility to resist. There was a mutter among the officers, the woman's face was turned from the group, pale and determined in the moonlight. The captain broke to cursing.

"Carr put this affair on me! I did not want you here! That I protested against from the beginning!"

"That I well know, Captain Richards. I also know why I was seized and delivered to you for deportation which is more than you!"

"I know not who these people are who demand you from one of His Majesty's ships. But I clear my hands of it until reparation is demanded in the courts,—Carr and his intrigues and all! We can not fight fivescore scoundrels boarding us. Madame, the choice is yours!"

"I take it." Her voice came clear, and proudly.

"Remember you are committing yourself to unknown adventurers—God knows, perhaps, the buccaneers who harried these waters not twenty years agone!"

There was a hoarse laugh among the *Seraphine's* fellows, which the chief stilled. The woman's calm voice answered the other's heat.

"I go willingly. I have not been more than a prisoner here."

"A boat," muttered Lafitte, swiftly turning. "Pull away, and have a care under the quarter when the lady comes alongside."

"Aye, sir!"

The *Seraphine* rode slowly on past the bark in the easy seas. Lafitte turned to De Almonaster when the yawl swung from the *Genaron's* side.

"I have a mind that you represent me, sir. I prefer to meet her in the cabin. First comes this matter of that cannon shot."

Raoul glanced wonderingly at the older man's stern emotion. Beluche and Dominique shrugged, and the latter muttered:

"The devil will pay for this when the bark makes the Indies with this tale. It must be up and out of the Windward Straits for us before the English Admiralty is scouring all the Caribbean!"

"And like a pack of cowed dogs our would-be mutineers stand and have Jean work his will with the merchantman! Not a spike raised, or a howl for plunder! Lord, it is not like old days!" laughed Beluche grimly.

"The lady comes," grunted the alderman; "make way there!"

"First—ere she puts foot on the deck—who fired that shot?" The commander motioned to the bo'sun. "Johanness! Fetch Burke and John Crackley! Those two, at least, were recognized."

The under-officers hustled the two malcontents out of the disorder along the waist. Crackley, the Englishman, swaggered with a confidant leer.

"You fired that gun, sir?"

"I fired no gun."

"Burke!"

"Neither did I, sir. And a damned good shot it be, I say!"

"Silence!" The captain looked over the press of evil faces. And from the rear a hoarse voice chuckled:

"'E was no gunner, that I'll say. Nothin' 'e knew but point and pull lanyard when some one give the word the Britisher was swingin' fair pointblank in the gun's eye!"

"It was a wager—" croaked another. "Crackley's horse pistol against a butt o' the gentlemen's rum!"

Upon the port rail, staring off at the approaching small boat which brought Mademoiselle Lestron to her rescuers, John Jarvis sat idly gazing into the muzzle of a brass flintlock. There was not an eye of all the crowd that did not go to him; an evil laugh arose. The gentlemen's jester peered with grave curiosity down his weapon's nose.

"Jarvis," whispered Beluche. "I had a mind o' Jarvis—"

At his name the buffoon arose with airy unsteadiness. The crew made way for him

until he stood below the poop steps looking up against the lights. His blinking eye found the Count de Almonaster, and to him he bowed, alone, apparently:

"Monsieur, I have won a pistol. I have a mind to borrow of you powder and ball—to find a tutor who will instruct me which end is which."

The commander drew his breath sharply. The small boat was bumping under the schooner's counter, a deckman thrust a hook to sheer it off to the boarding-ladder. The gentlemen of the quarter-deck looked down upon the solitary figure in the space before the fo'cas'le men.

"Jarvis?" said the master quietly. "You fired that gun?"

"What a trick!" exclaimed the mountebank. "To pull a cord attached to a mere device of iron and powder, and achieve more notoriety than if I had painted a picture for the Salon! Amazing! I am done with paint pots!"

"He is drunk, sir—" muttered De Almonaster in the captain's ear.

"He is very sober, sir," retorted Beluche, scowling at the puzzled faces of the men behind the culprit. "It is his time o' sober

hours—from now till one o'clock each night—as he says, in remembrance of the lady!"

The boat's crew was making fast, the bow men climbing the short ladder. They stood back respectfully to make way for her. The silence grew painfully acute. The cloaked figure of a woman was assisted to the rail and past the guards. She looked about puzzledly, as if not seeing clearly who first would address her.

"The man—Jarvis—below, to the brig, Bohon!" The master spoke low, swiftly, and with a mask of indifference that had concealed his pain.

His guards threw Jarvis back past the crowding ruffians and hurried him forward. But as he was seized he whirled his empty pistol by the ring and made as if to drop it into a bravo's sash which did not exist. It was, indeed, the air of a *poseur;* a ridiculous satire upon the man of action, the pistoleer and bully-swordsman.

And the lady who looked back at him from her coach on the Esplanade, now did not see him at all! She had gone swiftly to the after-companion, with its gilded panels and royal carpet leading to the cabin of the emperor.

Old Dominique it was, who had indicated the way with a rotund bow. As she tripped down the stairs with one amazed glance at the elegance of the tapestried walls beyond, the group on the quarter-deck descended to follow. The crippled bark was drifting off on the gulf current past the schooner's bow. A bewildered silence held them all.

At the companionway the bronzed lamp showed the captain's face. De Almonaster started at the grief, the stern, pent sadness of the leader.

"Jarvis," he muttered: "My friend—Jarvis—"

"Why this fool's mutinous play!" blustered old Dominique.

"It was so that you could never return to the ports of the world," put in Raoul de Almonaster. "An act of piracy—an overt act of war by a ship that flies no flag, against the power of England. He condemns you to a part he would play himself and can not—Sazarac, the last sea-rover . . . and the lover, Jean!" And the count added hurriedly: "Go, now. You have my pledge to aid in this affair. On my honor, Monsieur—you shall be none but Sazarac."

CHAPTER XII

THE PARTING OF THE PATHS

De Almonaster stepped aside as the two came to the brocade portières that hung at the portal of Napoleon's cabin. The other man, therefore, had stepped within, and the brilliance of the polished lamp cluster with its crystal reflectors was full upon him. Raoul heard Mademoiselle Lestron draw a sharp breath ere he came within the room; the *Seraphine's* master was looking upon her, his arms folded across the ruffled whiteness of his shirt-bosom, chin sunken in the black satin stock about his neck.

"Sazarac!" she cried sharply. "Sazarac—the river gamester!"

"Playing high again, Mademoiselle Lestron—to serve you!"

The lustrous blackness of her eyes was narrowing. She threw the cloak higher with one arm before her chin as if, in fear or some

curious revulsion, to shut the thought of him away. And then she dropped this and stood facing him. The younger man in the doorway could sense that her figure tensed with a haughty command, that she must not fear.

"Monsieur Sazarac," she repeated quietly. "This is a strange affair! How can it be? You—why should you take me from the ship of my country?"

"Why did you come?" he retorted, and his somber smile lightened. "The choice was yours, Mademoiselle—even at the last."

"I did not know! The Americans! I thought a swift vessel of some authority had been sent to take me back . . . to face them, perhaps, as one accused—" she hesitated. "Well, I came to this ship, because of the outrage that was put upon me in New Orleans by those who feared me." And again her resolute eyes sought to question his: "Sir, it was my defiance led to that act! You will conduct me, sir, back to New Orleans?"

Monsieur Sazarac bowed; his hand went to his silk stock with a flicker of amusement as if musing what his neck would be worth in any port of America. "If," he said quietly, "that should be your dearest wish."

She leaned upon the rosewood table, ambitiously carved with the monogram of Bonaparte by some chuckling artisan of the rue Royale. Her eyes lifted in some puzzle from the initials to the gentleman across.

And on the silence there came a shout from the waist of the ship. A rolling boast, followed by discordant choruses of laughter.

"With one shot I lay a ship to, helpless on the sea! Oh, bullies! One shot—my first shot! I—Jarvis! Why didn't I play the part of Lafitte long years ago?"

The muffled cry was drowned in imprecations and more fo'cas'le laughter. Mademoiselle Lestron gave Monsieur Sazarac a swift measuring glance.

"I assure you—a rough jest of my rough crew, Mademoiselle."

She shivered slightly. "Lafitte? I recall, when a child, that his men plundered my father's home at La Casa Montana in the Grenadines—"

"He has long vanished from these peaceful seas, Mademoiselle." Again his deferential bow, the detached amusement in the melancholy eyes.

But there came a stir at the threshold of the emperor's cabin. She turned to another figure there. A slighter man, but tall. He too, wore the evening clothes of the period from the snowy ruffles of his bosom to the low silver-buckled shoes. His dark, slender, youthful face was lit by an unbelieving hope. The Count de Almonaster stepped nearer.

"What have you said?" he whispered. "*La Casa*—in the Grenadines? You are Louise L'Estrange? You—are the child of the refugees from Martinique?"

"Monsieur?" she answered wonderingly: "Surely! How could you know?" And then she stepped nearer with a cry that rang: "Monsieur de Almonaster!"

He took her hands, and bowing, kissed her finger-tips. A great light was in his eyes—the glitter of an incredible triumph. The girl flushed, and her own glance went from one gentleman to the other.

The elder was in rapt surprise. Then the impenetrable reserve of his habitual demeanor slipped as a mask before his face. He took snuff gravely from a golden trinket of a box; and then regarded them with the air

of one who knew everything, had planned everything, and was but merely watching the consummation of his desires.

Louise Lestron cried out joyfully again, coming closer to the younger gentleman. There was in it a swift relief, as if she hurried to his protection. The gamester had said he loved her . . . that he would claim his pawn . . .

"Monsieur de Almonaster, who befriended me eight years ago after the blacks massacred my family, destroyed our estate! Young Raoul, the schoolboy on his way to Paris, who sought a frightened little girl among the refugees and charged the captain of the ship that she must be sent to Quebec to seek her uncle, with the fullest consideration!"

"The very same. I went to Paris. I . . . visited Quebec after my three years at St. Cyr. I searched in the Indies ports—I sought word of little Mademoiselle L'Estrange, the orphaned girl of the slaves' revolt."

There was hardly need to guess at the reason for his search. The girl turned aside. The Captain Sazarac bent upon the younger man a look of odd remembrance.

"My name was changed a trifle—Anglicized, Monsieur, by the family of Colonel Carr. I am his ward." She hesitated and turned to the commander of the *Seraphine*. "Monsieur Sazarac, of the Mississippi packet, will know of Colonel Carr. Sazarac, the gamester—" she had not meant to say it; she turned troubled eyes upon him. Then she covered them with her hands: "An infamous wager in a card-room of New Orleans —perhaps Monsieur Sazarac will know, now, the station of the pawn he gambled for!"

She drew herself up with an imperial scorn, but at his slow, deepening smile this seemed of little avail.

"You came to me at the hour of my deep despair, Monsieur—" she went on more quietly. "The night at the hotel—I broke with Carr's intrigues from that moment. And then—well, I knew too much for his safety. A discredited adventurer, his commission already recalled by His Majesty's Government, plotting with the malcontents of the Northwest and with the Spaniards across the Sabine against Louisiana. The conspirators seized me, hurried me upon the *Genaron* lest

I disclose the truth to Mr. Langhorne, my nation's consul at New Orleans. Carr is in the pay of the Spanish king—an agent of the Holy Alliance that wishes to embroil England and America again in war, lest the United States grow too powerful in the West."

"I guessed as much," said Captain Sazarac absently, taking his snuff again. "Even before that night at the hotel, Mademoiselle—"

"That night!" queried Raoul. "It has been a mystery—you did not challenge Colonel Carr as all the town expected. From that night, there was a change in you, Monsieur Sazarac!"

Monsieur Sazarac shrugged. Louise Lestron's glance upon him seemed to appeal to whatever chivalry there could be in a gamester of the packets.

A camellia from her hair, thrown from the balcony to the moonlit court . . . a mad trick, out of her youth and loneliness and despair. She wondered, now, if Sazarac, the gamester, had found a camellia in the moonlight . . . if from that hour and that quiet resolve, he had intrigued to this amazing rescue of her on the wide sea?

The sea itself was not more unreadable than the face of its adventurer. Mademoiselle Lestron winced with a curious pain, a pathos at the silence between them. And suddenly Raoul swept about impetuously upon the elder man.

"Monsieur! Do you recall the dinner at my country-seat? A confidence I made to you! A memory—a child—a lovely child—burned in the memory of a dreamer-schoolboy? Paris—all the world could not make him forget!"

The other bowed. His faint smile came; the nonchalant voice flowed smoothly on: "I am twice honored. I am twice the chosen confidant. Monsieur Sazarac brings, with a sweep of either hand, two charming stories out of the thin air. He understands everything—does Monsieur Sazarac. He will now be the second jester of the *Seraphine*."

"Jean!" The young man started to him in hurt grief.

"I beg you!" The master's bronzed hand uplifted.

"Ah, Sazarac!" Raoul placed his fingers on the gold braid of the other's sleeve. De Al-

monaster seemed stunned by some resurging revelation that he had forgotten. He placed his arm quite about the other's shoulder.

"I will not speak," the flushed youth whispered. "I am in honor not to speak. Monsieur, can you understand me?" And he whispered even lower so that no accent might come to her wondering ears. "You are Sazarac, a gentleman who sails the *Seraphine*. You have stirred her deeply with some mystery of you . . . Monsieur Sazarac, she shall follow her heart into that mystery or not—as she chooses."

The two gentlemen parted silently. Mademoiselle Lestron of Quebec lifted wide eyes at this embrace between the packet gamester and the Count de Almonaster y Roxas. There was no one who did not know of his family, ancient even at this day in Louisiana, holding from the Spanish viceroys before the times of Carondelet.

"We were speaking of an intrigue," commented Sazarac gravely. "Carr's activities in the Northwest, and now his purposes among the Spaniards. You are English, Mademoiselle, a Colonial Tory, I believe, formerly of New York—"

"We detest the Americans. In the islands, in the Canadas, three generations have plotted against the Washington government. But now—" she stopped: "Well, I realize the futility of stirring revolt in Louisiana. The empire of the West that Carr and the agents of the Holy Alliance think might check the Republic's power—I have seen enough to know it will never arise on such miserable foundations as greedy fur-traders, drunken soldiers cashiered from the king's service, and traitorous politicians of Washington." She turned impetuously to De Almonaster: "You, Monsieur, if any should know, it should be you?"

"A Republican of whitest heat, Mademoiselle Lestron;" he bowed. "You have been led to a dream that has not a ghost of verity! Why, look you! Across the Caribbean, this very day, the rebels are driving the Spanish king's men into the sea! What can the European monarchists hope in North America?"

"I tell you there is danger!" she retorted stubbornly. "That is why I came from the *Genaron*. That is why you shall haste me

back to Louisiana with all speed to let both English and American authorities there know that Colonel Carr is a discredited intriguer, coming to our British consul with false commissions. Langhorne is the dupe—he would throw Carr into jail if he knew he was the traitorous agent of Spain and not Britain!"

De Almonaster saw the recognizing admiration for her ringing words, the fire of her appeal, in the other man's eyes. It stirred him with a dumb jealousy; he turned aside to stare through the open port.

"Messieurs!" the girl cried hotly. "It must not be! Spain's agents are busied all through the West, taking advantage of the restlessness. They will bring on war between England and America if they are not exposed. They plan, even now, some overt act that will involve the two admiralties!"

"The overt act—" Sazarac's smile came slowly. "It is here—a solid shot to the mast of the king's ship! We shall hear more of this—"

"Under what flag, Messieurs, is this ship?"

The two gentlemen looked oddly at each other.

A Paramount Picture. *Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea.*

"SAZARAC" THWARTS THE PIRATES OF THEIR LOVELY PRIZE.

"Ah, a flag for Sazarac!" murmured the master. "Well, let us see?" He paused with the touch of a *poseur*: "The seas are wide . . . far is the way to their secret places—but where is a flag for Sazarac?"

She stirred at this high mocking. It was as if he had found amusement in her own fervor.

She had felt the thrill of a renunciation, giving to her hereditary enemies, the Americans, the story of the formless plots against their rude empire in the West. She was still impassioned with it all—and the master of the *Seraphine* smiled detachedly.

"You are, in all honor, bound to send me back to New Orleans, Monsieur," she cried sharply. For even now, with the protecting arm of De Almonaster by her side, she recalled Sazarac, the gamester . . . he had sworn to claim her, and he was here, standing apart with that faint irony in his smile.

"You will sail at once for New Orleans, Messieurs?" she repeated.

"Sazarac—at least," the master bowed, "will find welcome."

And even as De Almonaster stared at this

evident madness, there came a step on the emperor's red-plushed staircase. The admiral of Cartagena, second in command upon the *Seraphine,* came to the tapestried portières.

"Sir—" he broke in shortly, with a surly glance at Mademoiselle Lestron, as if this affair of the English woman was taking far too much of the hour. "The bullies are howling again. They swear to drag Jarvis from the brig and crown him an emperor of the last buccaneers—"

"Silence—you!" the captain said sternly. "What is this, sir?"

"The wind is picking—" said De Almonaster, turning from the port where now the royal curtain was fluttering. "Sir, a sailing wind!"

"That is it," grumbled Beluche. "The devils have smelled it. They have been waiting for it. They say they have stolen the lady for you, and kept their hands off a helpless prize out of tribute to—Sazarac. Now—"

The two gentlemen looked upon the old sea dog and he became confused as he saw the lady's bright eyes on him with rising curiosity.

"Yes?" queried the master languidly. "Speak on!"

"They wish to throw off pretense. They desire to know where this ship is sailing, now that we pick sailors' weather. They demand—"

Captain Sazarac suddenly interposed sharply. "Demand? Sir, say to them—nothing! We shall lay the course, sir, without advice from the crew!"

"Aye, sir." Beluche saluted uneasily. "But the ship is coming up to a wind. A course, sir—for the watch—"

"Monsieur Sazarac is returning to New Orleans!" Mademoiselle Lestron laughed brightly and turned to look at him. De Almonaster saw the challenge in her eyes; it was growing to a conquering gladness, to a faith in Monsieur Sazarac that he could refuse her nothing.

And Monsieur Sazarac bowed low. "To New Orleans, sir."

"Sir!" shouted Beluche, and then stopped. The eyes of Sazarac had been turned upward to the open skylight above the emperor's cabin. He had thought a gleam of steel, or

another eyeball had reflected the glitter of the crystal lamp. And then they all heard above, on the deck, the sound of bare feet retreating hastily, fainter and fainter.

"There was a spy from the fo'cas'le," muttered Beluche. "They wished to know . . . Perdition! You can not mean New Orleans! Crackley has bullied them with this; that, once aboard, the English woman would rule this ship!"

"You will go forward, sir," returned the master quietly. "The fellow who laid above this cabin listening,—you will find him, and lay him in double irons."

"Aye, sir!" But the old seaman turned pathetically at the foot of the stairs. "But name o' God! We might as well put our necks on the block in New Granada for the king o' Spain's men, as lay again to the Place d'Armes in New Orleans!"

"We are returning," said the other steadily, "for the peace of the seas between two nations. Eh, old brawler of the ports! Are you with me? You, Beluche? Bohon, Black Mike, Gorgio—Slit-Nose? Are they not with me?"

The old buccaneer watched the English woman out of hard, blinking, salt-reddened eyes.

"Eh, *bien!*" he growled at length. "A port for Sazarac! Hell's bells will ring for us! The young gentleman may save his neck, but you and I—Monsieur—Sazarac? Very well—it is for the English woman!"

CHAPTER XIII

MONSIEUR—OF THE CANNON SHOT

But that one hour's fitful cap of wind out of the south died ere the watch changed. The lady of the *Genaron* had been put safely away in the emperor's own suite; and whatever whispered conferences there were, fore or aft, upon the Napoleon ship, never a word of it drifted to her curtained ports.

She came to the quarter-deck the next morning. Monsieur de Almonaster sprang up from a cushioned locker under the awnings. There seemed no other life upon the schooner; no need for sailing trim, for the long black hull lay on the slow swell of the Mexican Gulf, canvas limp, and yards aslant, the tiny curl of smoke from the galley going up straight into the dead air. Southward her eyes made out a dim low smudge of forest line above the blue hot sea.

"Monsieur de Almonaster," she queried, after his greetings, "what is that shore?"

"It appears that we are far down in the bight of Campeche after the chase of you," smiled Raoul. "The lookout picked up a sail at dawn—idle as we are, but they fear it is a Spanish frigate or a troop carrier out of the Mexicoes. She is flat in the tide but she must have sighted us. The *Genaron* must have cleared her broken stick and gone off in the mists easterly. *Nom de Dieu!* The older dogs deem this an evil shore!"

"Where is Monsieur Sazarac?"

"In his cabin—writing."

"What is this mystery?" Louise Lestron put her fingers to his sleeve with an appeal that drew his restless eyes. "The steward's black boy who served my breakfast would not respond to my idlest question. And at the end, suddenly he blurted that he had a message for me. He repeated it as it was given, and knew nothing, explained nothing; vanished like a frightened slave."

"A message!" exclaimed Raoul curiously.

"He merely said: 'The gentleman who clung to the lamp-post wishes the lady to know that he has a new waistcoat in honor of his love for her!' What is the jest, Monsieur?"

"Ah!" Raoul laughed sorrowfully. The prisoner of the brig had been on his mind nightlong. "It appears a jest! I thought you meant this ship?"

"I am not blind to that. My room is one that a princess might envy—it needed hardly a guess to know this is the ship that your fantastic Creoles of Louisiana designed for Bonaparte. I heard much of the grand scheme, even in Quebec. His Majesty's officers about all the ports are laughing at it. A plot, advertised as it is, with feasts and masquerades!"

Monsieur winced. He did not think the Tory lady should know that he, himself, had some thousands invested in the plot Napoleon.

"I can not imagine Monsieur Sazarac commanding on so crackbrained a scheme as this of the Louisiana gentry," she went on. And then with a timidity new to her: "Of him, Monsieur—what do you know?"

"Of Monsieur Sazarac," Raoul retorted gravely. "Suppose I should say there was a man standing at the parting of two paths. One might have led to a glorious name—at least to a glorious death in an exploit that

the world would never have forgotten—to rescue the exiled emperor! The other leads most certainly to failure, to disgrace, oblivion and a felon's end. What if, Mademoiselle,—Sazarac, the gamester, chose the last—for you?"

"For me?" she cried swiftly. "Why, that is quite impossible!"

"Then I am the third jester of this ship," smiled De Almonaster.

She studied this mystery. Then she looked at him with shrewd guessing eyes: "You mean, Monsieur, that Sazarac is one who dares not face his fellow-countrymen again! A mere river gamester—who, by some means past my understanding, leads this restless, swaggering crew to rescue me! What should he fear because of me?"

"He does not fear," retorted Raoul. And presently he found a reason to go from her. She studied his mood with a frown between her lovely eyes. Indeed, upon the Esplanade, among the carriage beauties, they might well have looked after the lady from Quebec. The colonial sun of her birthplace had given her the color of warm lands; the North her cour-

ageous bearing. Even the drowsy crew, sprawled forward in whatever shade offered, looked aft, noting that she met their stares boldly, but with indifference.

"It is my honor," mused De Almonaster, "that I stay away from her. I—upon whose lips love is bursting! I, who have sought for her, and waited! Even as Jarvis, the lunatic, who wishes her to know of his new waistcoat."

Mademoiselle Lestron saw the master but once; after her siesta in the cabin, which was hardly more endurable against the flat heat of the dead calm than the deck, he came to her under the awnings. It appeared that the gentlemen had agreed that the after-deck was for the sole use of Mademoiselle when the ship was not being worked. At least the fat councilor, Dominique, and the truculent Beluche, smoked their long pipes down the rail and kept well out of question-reach.

"You are comfortable, Mademoiselle, after this blistering day of calm?" Sazarac inquired gravely.

"Your black boys could not have done more—except to enlighten me! Monsieur

Sazarac of the Mississippi packets—are you a magic worker that, from a card-room, you leap to command a gunned schooner?"

"With one trifle of a pause—upon the staircase of a house, a certain night." And after that he left her, the relenting, pretty speech unsaid upon her lips; and she was used to gentlemen awaiting her favor.

The sun was setting when Johannes came up from quarters and raised a moistened finger to feel the air. The heat had been a thing to thicken the blood in a man's skull that day.

"A wind," he growled to old Bohon, with truculent humor: "a bit o' wind for Captain Sazarac! La-la!—a wind for Sazarac!"

"It took a rope's end to beat the name into the galley boys," grumbled Bohon, "and more than a quarrel to have the fo'cas'le mouth the name aright. Sazarac—the Captain Sazarac! John Crackley, who might well be in irons, save that I volunteered to Jean that it was inexpedient, glowers over this deceit of Sazarac. Some of these scoundrels will yet tell the lady the truth—that she is the guest of Jean Lafitte on a ship cut free for marauding on the Spanish Main again!"

"And die for't," grunted Johanness, "for I will pistol the first that betrays him."

"But women—bah! The first week out—women! The venture will miss fire if those back on the quarter-deck drool over women! Old dog, he can not hold these fellows long with an intrigue over a woman! It is even rumored that she plead with the captain to sail at once on the first wind back to New Orleans on some affair of hers."

"I know," muttered the bo'sun doubtfully, "but he can not mean it. The *calaboza* for us all, if not the gallows. Besides the laughing about the levees—we would be a sick and sorry lot of dogs sneaking back to plead guilty of stealing a ship—to please a woman! No, Jean can not dare that!"

"I will be with him," declared old Bohon stoutly.

"Aye—and I! And Nez Coupe, Gorgio and Joe Rigo! And a dozen of the crew to whom he is Jean of old days! But there are two-score brawling ne'er-do-wells to whom Lafitte is but a name to conjure up plunder—wine and gold scattered in the ports where some *alcalde* durst not question us! In the

first heat of this foray we did not pick our crew with the greatest wisdom, Bohon. The affair last night is not the end. Jean had best look well to his lady, if he means this o' making the river passes again to please her."

The bo'sun waddled past the snoring groups forward. Here and there one watched him covertly. John Crackley sat up from the pitchy seams and wiped his bandaged brow. He nudged Black Michel as Johanness passed.

"Have you marked that squab, Mike? He was one who was all against us lifting a shilling from the bark—devil take such privateering!"

"I, for one, will not go back," grumbled Michel. "I knifed a dock guard the night we left—it was an old score I had with him. No, Saz-a-rac can not put to port with me!"

"Nor I. Nor Burke nor Kelly. Nor Mariano, the Manilaman, who has the price over his head. Old Budge took government money when he left the customs dock. I say—" The deserter rubbed his palm and glowered aft at the awnings.

"What say—John?" grunted the two, their wary eyes on the bo'sun forward.

"We watch what course he lays. To the straits, or down off Cozumel, we say nothing until a prize shows. And the schooner is laid nor'ard—eh?"

"A bloody good lay-to, I say! After that, meeting a ship, we'll have no Saz-a-rac who must ask a lady before we can lift a rum cask off her!"

And that issue of the land breeze, which picks up in these latitudes after the sun goes down, hovered like a ghost over the lacquer table in the cabin of the emperor where there sat to dine with the lady of the *Genaron,* Beluche, the gold-braided admiral of Cartagena; Dominique, the alderman of New Orleans; the Count de Almonaster, and Sazarac who sat in the host's chair with the guest at his right. They were astounded at her gown for the evening until they recalled that the lady's baggage had come from the luckless bark that night of her rescue. Pale rose was the shimmer of her silk, like the myrtle of the court where he had first come to claim her as his wager; and there was a perfume that recalled the jasmined walls.

The lamps of brass and crystal shone very

bright, but there was one vacant chair among the gentlemen. Raoul glanced at it, seeing that their guest had done the same. The serving man seemed suddenly disturbed.

An old free man of color with a broad expressionless face, haled from some staveyard of the river-front and of service to the Barataria smugglers since before the days of Pakenham, it was impossible to suppose that a sentiment could stir his sluggish savagery. Yet now, his beady eyes were eloquent. He lingered by De Almonaster's chair:

"Monsieur—of the cannon shot—wished a place set for him, though he can not come to tell the lady that he loves her."

Raoul glanced at Sazarac. The leader's eyes were on the vacant seat.

The ghost of the lost friend might have sat there, the sorry jester of the new waistcoat, so long the constraint grew among them. Mademoiselle Lestron looked curiously from one to the other; then to the admiral with the trappings of the gimcrack republic of the South, and the velvet-clad respectability of the alderman.

"What is the jest, gentlemen?" she cried.

"The guest who can not come!" She lifted her glass: "A toast to him, then—what say you all?"

The four gentlemen drank it after a curious pause, waiting for the cue of Sazarac.

"And now," growled Beluche, "to a wind against him—a wind o' death!"

"It is a phrase of the coast," put in Raoul hurriedly, seeing the sudden recoil of the smiling lady of the emperor's cabin from this grimness: "The hurricane month is upon us, after these calms. A wind—there must be many of the Spanish king's ships—heavy-gunned frigates—lying in the tides above us, helpless as we. Here's to a topsail breeze to take the *Seraphine* from under their clumsy feet!"

And as they were drinking this, and Mademoiselle was breaking into a chatter to cover the grotesque menace she could not divine, there came a tap at the door. A face showed there—a fair, young ship's 'prentice, whom De Almonaster remembered as being one of the English deserters.

He raised a warning hand past the black serving man. "A word, sir!"

"Yes, my lad? But what is this?"

The boy crept about to Sazarac's chair as if the master's protection must serve him.

"I am Clark, sir—from the *Genaron.* Bohon sent me from the wheel. He wished to report privately, sir. There is a light in the south—the steersman says it is a shore light. He does not like the drift in this tide sou'-sou'west, and he thinks the leadsman lies when he says we have more than eight fathom o' water."

"What is the meaning of this?" cried the skipper. "Bohon—why must he send a man in secret to me? Speak up, Clark!"

"He did not wish to arouse them for'ard, sir, and he does not trust the lookout or the sounding. He suddenly fears the watch have a mind to let the schooner beach herself, sir, on a spit o' sand—"

The master's hand had swung up, his face darkling. "What? Has it gone so far as this? They are out of control forward?"

"The deck officer, sir, has disappeared. Bohon is suspicious of something that he can not put eye or hand upon." The lad stopped, as if he was not telling all. "And, sir, I would

have a care how any of your party go above. It might be better if none suspect you are warned—"

The captain raised his hand: "Then, gentlemen, one at a time—to the steersman. Beluche, you follow! Clark, I count on you, sir!"

"I could not stand wi' 'em, sir. They threatened me. They have freed Mr. Jarvis from the brig—he found drink at once for 'em—"

"Jarvis!" Sazarac was upon the companion-stairs, leaving them all in an astounded silence. The empty chair of the jester, to De Almonaster's eyes, seemed to hold a grinning, ragged wastrel of the rue Royale . . . and beyond the health drunk to him, the feast was untouched. The admiral of Cartagena hitched his sword-belt higher, nodded to them, and stole above. Clark was at his heels, and once aft, took the wheel from old Bohon.

"Now, then," said the master, "what do you know, Bohon?"

"It is the strange silence, sir. The ship is flat as a dead ship. Black Michel had charge o' the watch, but it is as if every soul had

vanished after they gave me the last sounding. I had the lead out because we made out a spit o' land once at dusk, you remember."

"The forward lookout?"

"I had no answer when I asked about that light off our port bow, sir."

"They must have all gone below, sir—Black Mike and his watch with them," muttered Beluche. "An unlawful drinking bout, perhaps, with the rum that it seems Jarvis finds way to get to 'em."

"Beluche, you will come with me to see to this. The older men, surely the Baratarians, are not with the levee renegades we shipped along!"

"It is plunder they came for, sir," grunted the admiral. "First, we must get to the arms room."

"They are watching that, sir," whispered Clark. "They smuggled ten muskets from some concealment, but they lack powder."

"Name o' the devil!" blustered the admiral. "Come! Lafitte's name with the old bullies! No more o' this Sazarac, I say!"

De Almonaster was with the two as they passed the main-mast. Then another figure

slipped to them from the shadows. "It has come quick, sir," Nez Coupe whispered. "They must rid the ship o' the English woman, they say; and then ask you a fair word for a prize. If not that, death to Sazarac—"

"They need not wait—" laughed Sazarac. "Come,—death to the first three men that show! Then a fair word to the rest! Monsieur de Almonaster, your pistols ready? Come, down the after-companion and to the arms room. How many are there of us to be trusted at the first?"

"I say you must be Jean Lafitte, sir," growled Beluche. "Jean o' the *Black Petral* for this night. Old bullies will come roaring to you, once this clatter o' Sazarac and the English woman is done among 'em!"

"Well, then—Lafitte," he smiled. "Come, you all, with Jean again!"

"The arms room," Bohon moved like a shadow down the passage. "Once sure o' that, clear 'em to the deck and drive 'em howling! Burke and Crackley to be shot on sight, eh?"

"Aye," retorted Johanness. "Then we'll have the older bullies—they will balk, once they see the mettle in Lafitte's men."

The master had stationed Clark at the closed cabin aft, where the lady of the *Genaron* must be waiting in silent terror for the issue. But Dominique waddled to the group and whispered: "The English woman is calm as the sea itself. She looks to Sazarac for a quick stroke—"

"Come," said the commander. "In silence—"

A dim lantern showed the deck-beams over their heads as they crept along the waist. The arms locker was on the starboard side. Beside the door a figure beckoned to them in the shadows. It must be one of Nez Coupe's loyal ones; the little band stole on past the stowage rooms. Monsieur Sazarac had even turned to speak to the shadowy sentinel, when there came a rush of bare feet from either side. A hoarse shout broke. Steel rang on steel, a pistol exploded in the narrow passage. The rush caught the party with an impact that left no chance for weapons. A burly form hurled to Sazarac's shoulders, another dragged at his legs. De Almonaster broke his rapier at a vain thrust and went down under blows and curses.

The affair was over with surprising quickness. There must have been thirty mutineers roaring, struggling in the passageway. Along they dragged the prisoners, and none fought back now, for it was useless.

"The English woman!" shouted Crackley. "Ye'd sail for the English woman, Sazarac, and let us bullies dance to the music!"

"A free ship, hearties, and a wind for a prize!" howled Black Mike.

"You hang for this, Michel," cried De Almonaster. "And you, Burke!—and you—and you—and you—"

"Monsieur De Almonaster," murmured Sazarac. "This is of no avail."

"Aye, young gentleman!" howled another. "How did you come by this ship? The law will say to that, eh—John Crackley?"

It was this, indeed, that had won the crew to Crackley's plot . . . the ship's sailing was all outside the law—it was his who took it last.

The mutineers, a howling, disorderly pack, took the prisoners aft, and there, upon the quarter-deck, as one waiting to have honor done him, stood John Jarvis. Apparently he

was drunk, or apparently he was posing . . . it was of no moment. Monsieur Sazarac shot him one black look and then would face him no more.

"The commodore!" yelled the brawlers. "The Emperor o' the Bottle, who swore he would yet sleep in old Bony's bed! Turn in to't, Mad John!"

The jester raised an unsteady hand as if he would speak, and then thought better of it. He rubbed his nose and gazed upon them; he rubbed one ankle against the other, and his empty scabbard rattled. He drew aside his soiled, silken-lined cloak to show a parti-colored waistcoat with the air of a pantomimic who at least could have one trick.

His silence but heightened the effect, and the laughter. It was plain he was trying to enact the part of a swaggering frigate captain and making an absurd failure of it by a curious doleful humanness. Most plain, also, that he, of all, best knew this failure to play a Rhodomont.

"A better buccaneer than this Sazarac," croaked Crackley. "To think I once took a shot from this fellow off Rio in the old days!

Eh, well—sail south again! I—navigator; Black Mike, second; and Burke, bo'sun! Is it agreed?"

"The commodore! You forgot the commodore!" the ruffians shouted.

It appeared that the jester was about to speak, to make effort at a leadership of the evil spew he had evoked . . . and then his gesture died away. He, himself, turned away, a ghost figure by the port quarter-rail.

For the English woman had come with Clark, the frightened English boy. There was first a jeer and then a crowding to see her.

She stood apart from the group of prisoners, after a brief look at them, and turned to the mutineers. The black lace scarf she had thrown about her white shoulders when she left the untouched dinner in the cabin at the surly summons of one of Crackley's men, fell from her as if to disclose the bold quick challenge she had for them.

"What is this, then?" she cried sharply.

"We are taken, Mademoiselle," returned the master quietly. "That is all there is to it." He turned sternly to John Crackley whose leer upon the English woman boded no good for

her. "I demand safety for this lady. Let her return to her cabin. Do you understand me—respect in all things?"

"Eh?" grunted the other. "We'll see to that. Mates—" he glanced uncertainly at his fellows upon whom there had come a curious silence at the captain's assumption of authority, even at this pass; "The woman—now—"

His voice was cut short by the tremendous explosion of a huge pistol upon the poop-deck above them all. A single figure was there, an unkempt, grotesque man who now was peering curiously into the muzzle of his smoking weapon. Every eye had been drawn to him with a start.

Jarvis's pale face, framed in his long, matted black hair, turned down to them.

"You see, I missed it—" he said plaintively.

"Jarvis," Burke, the deserter, croaked, "what's that?"

"The cabin skylight—at ten paces. Name o' God! If I am to be commodore, I will need practise. Some of you kindly reload my pistol."

There was a shout of amazed laughter from them. The deck lamp showed the English

woman staring up at him; behind her, the prisoners of the quarter-deck. He came to the low rail and looked down.

Not at the lady who once looked back at him on the Esplanade. She might have been an unseen spectator over the footlights, and he the chief player at the center of the stage, taking his cue from an invisible prompter.

Neither did his old friends of the rue Royale, and of the smugglers' wine-shops of years agone, appear to exist in his eye. He shrugged, with an open palm down to the conspirators.

"How can I be a Sazarac—to slit a throat, pistol a tradesman, or scuttle a ship, without instruction from some one? And as to the woman—"

The evil mood of the fo'cas'le skulkers was turning to jeering, puzzled laughter. They turned from Crackley with raised weapons, offered with chuckles to the speaker.

"Mad John!" shouted Black Michel. "John o' the rum, and speckled waistcoat! Commodore, I say—and well's the need when we can not decide on't!"

"Eh, this is no fool's affair," growled Crackley. "Here we win a ship—"

"But no woman!" growled Burke. "She goes off the ship! No affair o' women, Crackley!"

"No women—" grunted Black Michel. "I vote with Burke—we'd ha' been hull down in Yucatan Straits and a good ship laid to by now, if it hadn't been for the woman!"

Crackley was casting sullen glances to the others. Greed, lust, fear for his hardly-won dominance over the mutineers—he tried to whisper to the nearer ones, but another croaking voice took it up.

"There never come good on a free cruise wi' women in it. I seen bullies fall out afore wi' a woman aft—"

"The commodore!" laughed another from the shadows. "Give the English woman to the commodore! He can play the fool with her and no harm to it, while we sail!"

And the evil laughter grew; it became an acclaiming uproar toward the ragged man upon the raised after-deck. Raoul saw him in the flare of the light . . . a sad and terrible face turned down to them, but upon the woman his eyes would not rest. He appeared a man who had failed again . . . who had

raised devils in his own heart and in those he swayed with his mocking—who lifted his eyes to a phantom of power and sweetness, but who was, after all, merely the ragged lord of the bottle and of his piebald waistcoat so carefully laid away until now in oiled paper in a crevice of the brig from which the mutineers had dragged him. He swayed uncertainly on his feet and looked down upon the expectant, jeering faces. Curiously enough, it seemed that they were his—to send hither, thither, as his humor would bend their evil. . . . And he did not know how to command them.

"Ho—Commodore!" They bawled up at him. "The word, Jarvis!"

The eye of Sazarac was coldly upon him. But to this friend of his old days, as irredeemable as these, he had the same blank stare as he had for Louise Lestron. As if they were not there—as if she was a mere ghost and he looking through her to the evil pack behind her.

And suddenly he yawned, his hand to his mouth, pulled his dirty cloak around him—it was a warm night and he must have worn the tattered silk merely for its theatricism as

it disclosed the cutlass which entangled his legs—and strode back to the main companionway. His shock of black hair disappeared slowly to the emperor's cabin.

The affair had been dismissed by him as of no consequence, it appeared. Yet he had interposed with his fool's act at just the moment to crush John Crackley's hope to possess the English woman . . . they had turned to him with laughter offering him this prize of the English woman. And the surly quarrel began once more among the mutineers. Only, now, at the muttered dissent of Crackley as to the English woman, there was a snarling protest.

"The longboat for her—and any o' the fine gentlemen who wish to follow!" shouted Black Michel. "No women for this ship, Crackley!"

"Aye!" howled another. "The Spaniard is lying off there not two hours' pull. Saz-a-rac will find welcome on the king's ship!"

The laughter grew again. Not a man of them all but knew what shift Jean Lafitte would have with the Spanish viceroy's captains. And the chorus grew to a clamor.

"The longboat for her! The Spaniard or the reef—it's no affair o' ours! I vote wi' Black Mike!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

Crackley turned a bitter eye upon the English woman. She had been curiously still; watchful, first of the jester of the after-deck, and then of the mutineers who crowded before her. Now she drew herself up with unmeasured disdain upon them all. At a word from Black Michel there had been a scattering of the crew. Some to the longboat davits, others to the store rooms. The rest began to curse and jest impatiently. Only, here and there, as if skulking from the eyes of Lafitte, some of the older men whispered dubiously.

Mademoiselle Lestron turned to the man she knew as Gaspar Sazarac, the gamester of Chartres Street. "And this has come to you because of me, Monsieur?"

"It is worth a thousand mutinies. Never fear—the Spaniards hereabout are not all cutthroats. You—the ward of Carr, who is the secret agent of their king . . . why, what have

you to fear from them, Mademoiselle Lestron?"

But old Beluche shook his head. It might be well at the Spaniards' hands for Mademoiselle Lestron of Quebec, and for the Count de Almonaster of New Orleans, descended from a line of Castilian viceroys of Louisiana; but for Jean Lafitte; for Beluche, of the Cartagenian rebels; Johanness, and the others who had harried the Mexican trade routes for thirty years—there was quick death in any port of New Spain for them all!

The mutineers well knew it. They were sending the gentlemen of the *Seraphine* to their fate as surely as if they had hurled them to the sharks.

But she could not know. When the longboat was ready, and the crew made way silently for her, she turned to Sazarac with a sudden timid softness:

"Monsieur, something is due you from me! Could I not appeal to them—could you not regain command and sail with them—if I was put adrift?"

He smiled; but it was as if he did not care to look upon her. He was as one who had

been given to see a beautiful vision, and before it had come an evil jester, a mocking voice to still the faint good he had sought.

De Almonaster had been watching. He followed her as the captain led the way. Near the rail the girl put her hand to Sazarac's sleeve.

"I am bewildered, Monsieur! It is as if you had given up much for me!"

"I have given much up for you," he answered quietly. "The wreck of years—wild evil, infamy, which—God willing—you shall never know!"

She looked back at Count de Almonaster. His face was averted, but he must have heard. He was even a trifle cold to her as he helped her to the ladder.

On his honor De Almonaster would not speak his old boy's love to her when her ever-questing eyes were going to the gamester, Sazarac—the mystery of Sazarac, the lure of Sazarac's promise that he would claim what he had won across Maspero's gaming table. She thought it very odd, even at this moment . . . the withdrawing of the two gentlemen from her interest, as if each was waiting,

watching, for the other to conclude his play. Two rapiers drawn but withheld, perhaps, for the opponent to tie his shoe.

And with a sigh she followed. But her last glance back showed a glimpse down through the open skylight to the cabin of the emperor. The lamps were very bright there. She saw a slouched figure in the chair of the host. A pale tall man eating and drinking greedily as if with a rare appetite for the viands of the emperor's stores. He jammed his faded velvet cap closer over his eyes, and then his hand found something by the plate that had been next to Sazarac's—her own.

It was a bracelet which she remembered had become disengaged when she drank the health to the chair of the missing guest. The man lifted the gold trinket, examined it under the light—and kissed it. Then he fell to eating with rather the manners of the barroom. The Emperor of the Bottle was in the chair of Sazarac . . . but after all, as was the way with him, when what he wanted was at his grasp, he could not take it. It was the same case as when he could not hit a window with his pistol at ten paces, or swagger his sword

without the point catching in a hole of his stocking. He never would aim carefully enough, or wear his small sword high enough . . . or love ruthlessly enough.

Outside he heard the splash of the oars waiting to take her away.

Then shouting, jeers from the scuffling mutineers. Crackley's rasping voice above the others:

"The boat, hearties! The English woman goes! The blue-blooded young gentleman of Louisiana goes! The master, Saz-a-rac, goes! Who else o' ye all to taste the fare o' the king o' Spain's ship?"

"Fat Dominique!" cried one. "Beluche!" said another. "There'll be welcome for the admiral o' Cartagena by the Spaniards! Bohon—Nez Coupe—aye, and this white rat, Clark, or I cut the heart o' him out!"

The lone guest in the emperor's suite could hear them descending to the longboat. There was a mutter when Johanness swung from the rail. But when old Gorgio, the sullen Catalan cutthroat of other days, the most bloody-minded of all the *Black Petral's* vanished crew, strode to the ladder, there was a yell.

"The old rib-sticker! He leaves us, mates!"

Gorgio eyed them with fierce disdain. "I sail with men," he growled: "not pot-house lawyers! Who, o' ye all, ever put foot across a bloody deck, save Black Mike? Who, o' ye louts, sailed the old days with Jean and Pierre?"

They let the yellow tiger go in silence. And one by one, others of the Baratarian privateers stole from the shadows and joined the longboat. Joe Rigo, Freniere; Teton, and two other free men of color—presently there numbered seventeen in all who crowded in the thwarts or stood, when, with Johanness at the tiller, the oarsmen swung from the schooner's side.

"Let go!" snarled Nez Coupe. "Part with the scum! Men o' La—" He stopped and glanced back at the lady: "But Sazarac is in command!"

There was a mutter, half amused, half of resentment, both from the exiles in the longboat and from the mutineers crowded at the rail. It suddenly appeared oddly clear to De Almonaster that not once, during the affair, had the name of Jean Lafitte been upon the

lips of the most unruly of them all. It struck the count as very strange; he glanced at the girl on the seat before him, wondering why the air had not rung with the most notorious name of the decades. Jean Lafitte himself, standing upright in the bow, silently watching the dim mysterious shore of savage Campeche, with its unconquered Indians, and still more ruthless Spanish captains holding every point of refuge, must have wondered.

"Monsieur Sazarac!" the girl cried suddenly, as if, with her own courage, to inspire hope in all the castaways: "I am glad to go! I have a feeling that these are now true men all!—for whatever venture lies ahead, I have no fear!"

The watching mutineers had been so silent that her clear voice carried far. It reached the lone banqueter at the emperor's table.

"Sazarac," he muttered. "Still, Saz-a-rac. I, too, have my honor—he can still play Sazarac—the elegant and chivalrous Sazarac—to the end."

For in that one thing the jester had ruled the outlaw crew. He had soberly and stubbornly pleaded and insisted; he had even

pointed his rusty, empty horse pistol at their grinning heads and ordained that the English woman must not be told the truth of Sazarac. He had sat in their council to plead for her life and the honor of his friend when he knew the mutiny could not be averted. He had won, and he had sent her away . . . still under the spell of Sazarac, the protecting arm of Sazarac.

The dip of the longboat's oars grew fainter, died to silence. The Emperor of the Bottle began to consider mordantly why he had not kept her when he might? As a Sazarac might do, or any freebooting adventurer . . . or even any strong man who loved? That was it—he didn't know how; he didn't even know how to address a word to her, hardly look at her. Presently he blamed his failure to-night on having been embarrassed by his satin waistcoat, or his neglect at shaving for a week . . . something was always the matter, and it was always a trifle.

CHAPTER XIV

A FLOWER FOR A RAGGED FELLOW

THE longboat made a shallow pass between two curving reefs of dreary sand, rising to wind-twisted mangrove clumps at the higher points, and was beached in a quiet lagoon. The red sunrise found them there marooned; silent men wandering over the waterless spaces and then coming back near to a shelter canvas which had been roped to the bushes for Mademoiselle Lestron. Then the last lieutenants of Lafitte sat apart to discuss the matter.

The *Seraphine* lay plainly visible west and north, her sails idle and a flat, smooth coastal tide between.

"She'll be beating off with the morning breeze," growled Bohon. "She moves to a feather, and it's beginning to stir a bit. What is this shore, Beluche? You have clubbed a prize along it you say in the old days."

"An evil shore. A nest o' savages with whom we could not parley!"

"How much water did Crackley leave to us?"

"Two casks; bread and the salt horse for three days—no more. We count six muskets and twelve pistols. When the Indians put off from the woods to spy us out we can hold 'em off a bit."

"Aye, for what? Where's a river mouth to make?"

"There is none the Spaniards do not hold. There is no cove either way where you would not find the king's men. The rest is jungle. . . . What does the captain say to it?"

The old fellows looked at the lady's shelter tent. From the beached longboat other men were wearily carrying ashore the scanty supplies left to the exiles. Dominique and De Almonaster came from the shade of the mangrove clumps and nodded to the group. Old Dominique puffed his long pipe tranquilly.

"What does Captain Jean make of it?" repeated Bohon to them.

"There is nothing to make of it," returned the alderman. "Eh, *bien!* A little while of

waiting—a day or two, old robbers, in the sun and without the water. At that, something will be tried. Leave it to Jean that something will be tried for ye all. The lady is at breakfast with the captain," he muttered irrelevantly. "He has toasted the bread—he has made the coffee himself for the English lady. Name o' God!—I have witnessed that!"

De Almonaster stood apart from them, peering at the dim blue forest wall far over the inlet waters southward. "It is fifty leagues to Progresso, is it not, Monsieur Beluche, and the Spanish governor?"

"It is fifty leagues to death," grunted the admiral. "Hell's bells! I had rather take the swamps and meet a Spaniard trader loading dyewoods—though there would be no difference. We have not food nor water to put off shore with, and nothing to meet, if we did!"

"Captain Sazarac is calling to you," observed the count. "Now, go, all—there is a message."

They went slowly, trudging through the sands with dry muttered jests and hopeless prophecies. Men, for the most part, past the prime of life; some heavy, indeed, with years,

coming before their captain with an endeavor to assume a sprightly seaman's bearing. Faithful, rugged, implacable faces—adventurers who had given their wild youth to him.

"It is in my mind to put the English lady and my friend, Monsieur de Almonaster, in the way of safety," said the chief quietly. "There is a chance for them. The rest—I, and you—" He stopped and smiled at them.

There was a shout. "I—and you!" Jean with them? Nez Coupe came closer, tying tight the bloody silken head scarf about his seal-brown skull. His wound-wrecked face took a ghastly grin. They would, then, still be rid of the English woman by some miracle! Jean would shake free of his burden of the English woman . . . and be with them once again?

"It can be established that Monsieur de Almonaster is of Spanish lineage; and that Mademoiselle Lestron is of a mission that was working in the pay of the Spanish king—" went on Captain Sazarac evenly. "If, then—they could reach a ship—a dyewood port on this deserted coast—it is probable they would find refuge. The rest—"

And again the shout of grim humor cut him off. The rest! Why, the rest could expect the reef, the tropic sun . . . and their captain! Still their sour, hopeless humor. Certainly there was nothing for the rest of them!

But now the English woman came out of the hot little shelter. She wore the captain's sea cap of blue and gold as if it had been needful to keep her brown hair from straying; and they murmured at her loveliness again, even though she was pale from sleeplessness. She had been stubbornly questioning him, and had found nothing save a smiling irony at the things she had proposed to do.

"Now, you will listen to me, also, men of the *Seraphine!*" she cried suddenly. "To me as well as to your captain! Surely there is a way for us after these treacherous mutineers put off with the schooner! Surely, I know your faithfulness to him and to your ship! What is there to fear for seamen who serve loyally their master and their ship?"

They listened curiously. Monsieur, the captain, pushed back the iron-gray hair from his temple and listened. It was as if he had heard it all and had no more answer than they.

"See, you!" The girl went on hotly. "Monsieur Sazarac, playing the part of a patriot to his adopted country! I—an English Tory—can testify to that! The attack upon the *Genaron*—surely I can swear to the admiralty of my country, that it was done for me—in all honor. Monsieur Sazarac's honor—"

There was a stir among them—then the silence again. Old Dominique sighed. The honor of Sazarac . . . the word of Captain Sazarac to the admiralties that his men were good and true!

"For me—in all honor. By you all—honorable men—"

Again she was puzzled by their stir and murmur. The grim Baratarians rubbed their heads in doubt themselves. Beluche walked away and began to cut at the grass with his saber, idly. Nez Coupe joined him, feeling of his wreck of a nose.

"You see, thief"—grunted the admiral—"what the English woman makes of us—honorable men! There is nothing to that . . . we will never make a British ship nor British port if there was. Name o' God!—what talk!"

The English woman knew she was failing with them. In fact, she had nothing to say except some formless, groping idea of hope, of gratefulness, of understanding with this strange, faithful, evil crew of Monsieur Sazarac.

Monsieur Sazarac was looking at her pityingly. Monsieur de Almonaster, with folded arms, quietly attentive, his calm face unreadable.

And suddenly this dull *impassé* was cut through with a shout. Gorgio, on the highest dune, was pointing seaward. "She is coming in! She is making the inlet wi' tide and tops'il air!"

The *Seraphine* was moving. Then there was another shout. Above her, in the misty offing, another sail showed, dimly and slowly under way.

"The Spanish frigate, sir!" cried Bohon. "Standing in close as she dares, to look the schooner over! Crackley must ha' hammered her rudder on the bar last night—I see a false rig over her end. She's fouled, and he's laying her up in the wooded river out o' the king's big guns!"

The exiles watched, and presently there leaped a dull flash in the morning mists far beyond the *Seraphine*, the sullen burst of the king's cannon. But the schooner slowly came in past the reefs to the forest river.

De Almonaster shrugged; it meant the end of flight or hiding for those marooned on the open reef. "Ah, well!—" he glanced about: "Mademoiselle, our honorable gentlemen may well look aghast!" He laughed, but to the chief he muttered: "Monsieur Sazarac, we might as well build a fort in the sands and sell our lives dearly. If not the Spaniards, it will bé the Campeche savages coming out upon us. If not them, starvation and the sun in a few days. There is no water on this reef, Monsieur!"

Mademoiselle had listened. De Almonaster's tone was light, as if proposing a trifle at Maspero's. It appeared as if both the gentlemen were affecting a debonair nonchalance for her sake. Monsieur Sazarac's shrug was of delicate dissent to discuss their lives' end in her presence. Then he smiled distantly:

"You will recall the instruction I once gave? You were to be my prisoner, Monsieur, in

event the *Seraphine* was taken on the seas? You were to be as one held to an unlawful affair against your will—"

De Almonaster flushed to his eyes: "Monsieur! Do you think that I—" he stopped. Sazarac could not offer him life lightly in her presence!

"Undoubtedly the Spaniard will accept you and Mademoiselle Lestron. Monsieur Dominique, also—a municipal officer of New Orleans . . . there is no reason why the Spaniard should not receive and protect you."

"And you?" The younger man could not help the whispered question.

Monsieur Sazarac laughed. It rang out lightly indeed. De Almonaster had never heard such care-free amusement on a man's lips. It stung him as if he had asked a child's question on predestination.

"I take it that the Spaniards will attack the *Seraphine* in those woods and leave no soul living on her. I assume that the mouth of every scoundrel on her will be closed by death. Then you—with Mademoiselle Lestron to the frigate—and say that you were marooned by the buccaneers, and claiming protection. Why, the Spanish governor at

Merida, or Vera Cruz, must know of Carr's plot! Surely he would welcome Mademoiselle Lestron and her friends!"

"Why, are you not, Monsieur, also my friend, and protected with me?" the girl cried wonderingly. "It is, indeed, a fair story—an intrigue to save us all! Why did I not think the Spaniards would protect us when they will suppose that I am still in the plot of Carr's purpose to aid their schemes? Messieurs, I can safeguard you all to Vera Cruz with that plea!"

They all heard her. But a silence fell. The girl looked eagerly from one weathered face to another of Monsieur Sazarac's few followers. De Almonaster, whose face had lighted joyously as her own, with her words, pressed his sword-knot to his lips and turned away. The Admiral Beluche bowed awkwardly. Dominique rubbed his chin. Nez Coupe screwed up his ghastly, wound-wrecked face, and Johanness shook his head. And they all looked at the commander . . . there was not a man of the lot whose blood was not worth a pocket of gold in any port of New Spain!

And suddenly Monsieur Sazarac laughed

again. Aloud and clearly. He arose and adjusted his neckerchief. There was a gasp, a grumbling bewilderment, and then laughter from all the old buccaneers. They slapped each other on the shoulders, grinning knowingly at their chief.

"My compliments to the lady!" shouted Johanness, "but the climate o' Vera Cruz—my lungs are delicate!"

"And I mind that I might have a humor o' the blood were I there!" mocked Bohon.

"My head—" complained the sour Nez Coupe, "the rest of it might go a-twist at sight of the governor's castle!"

Mademoiselle turned to the captain hotly: "What is this jesting?"

"They mean no disrespect." He motioned to the grinning crew with a serious affection: "Now, get you gone, fellows! See that our wine and little water is stored from the sun. Work the longboat closer in on the tide."

"Sazarac!" they shouted in hoarse laughter and went to obey him.

He saw the hurt pride in her eyes, and the old wonder at his evasion.

She turned to De Almonaster with a pathe-

A Paramount Picture.

Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea.

THE DYING CONFESSION OF JARVIS.

tic little gesture of despair at the moods of Monsieur Sazarac. Monsieur Sazarac had followed his ragged men to the stores and the longboat in the shallows.

"They will die, Monsieur, if they remain here. Why will he not go with me—why will they elect to stay with him, when I offer a way of life to them all?"

"It is the honor of men who have no honor," said Raoul gravely. "You would not win one of them from his side if you did offer life itself!"

She could not understand. She sat drawing figures in the sand, and when she raised her dark eyes, to watch the tall figure out by the sun-wash on the shoals, the young man saw the great tears in them which she presently wiped away.

"Louise!" Raoul cried. He sprang to her side; his arms yearned to hold and comfort her . . . and she kept looking past him to Monsieur Sazarac who laughed lightly at her buoyant scheme for his life.

"Why will he treat me so?" she cried. "Am I a child to be fooled with smiles that hide—ah, well!—I don't know what he hides!"

And Raoul could not say . . . even as he knew. He could not even make to touch her hand after he saw her look upon Sazarac, the gamester, who had come to this death upon a blazing Campeche reef for her . . . and laughed and turned aside with some mighty throb of man's love for the ragged men who followed him.

She dried her eyes with a final, resolute little sob. "Monsieur, do you know—well, once, he came for me . . . it was on the staircase of a court—the Hotel Orleans, and very late. He was going from me, and he had been all chivalry. He turned away, allowing Colonel Carr to boast that Sazarac would not fight, because he wished to spare my name. He said—ah, it was a silly thing for me to do!—but I dropped a flower to him as he left . . and another man stumbled from the shadows and picked it up."

"Another man?" echoed De Almonaster.

"That was before you had come to me, Raoul, on the *Seraphine*. As to the other man, that was no matter. I suppose a beggar in the courtyard caught my camellia. I don't know—it was silly to throw a flower to Saz-

arac, the river gamester . . . I was hot with shame afterward at doing so. But if he had caught it . . . Ah, well! I thank Heaven he never knew it!—after I found myself in his hands upon the *Seraphine!* The ragged fellow who caught it, stared up once and then hurried after Monsieur Sazarac. At the area-arch he turned. It appeared he tried to pose as a—lover, and then he fell over his own foot, or something, very absurdly!"

"A ragged fellow," muttered De Almonaster.

"Like one of these old tattered followers. A ghost of a man fading into moonlight!"

"Monsieur Sazarac is one followed by old ghosts who fade into more than moonlight. Ah, that ghost who played the Romeo after Sazarac!—who would pose with the assurance and courtliness of Sazarac! I am almost put to envy both of them!"

"Why, what do you mean, Monsieur!"

"They both stick in your memory because of their mystery," the young man said. Then he swept upon her passionately and then withheld from the touch to her hand. "Louise! When a thing comes to pass, I shall say I love you!"

"Monsieur! Be still—he is coming back. And what is that noise?"

He tried dumbly to discover whether the startled look in her eyes was because of his words, the approach of Sazarac, or the rolling reverberations of a cannon shot that broke on the still air.

A shout arose from the exiles who were dragging the longboat nearer in the shoals. Monsieur Sazarac had paused half-way to them. He saw what had hitherto been hidden by a low spit of sand.

Five armed boats had drawn inshore, coming from the distant Spanish frigate, without doubt. They had crept unnoticed by the refugees on the reef until they were fair in the break of forest wall where there had been the last glimpse of the *Seraphine's* snowy sail.

"Do you see, Monsieur de Almonaster?" said the chief of the exiles quietly. "It was as I reasoned. The schooner will be taken this night. It is what one would greatly desire. The dons will have no quarter for Crackley's men—there is no escape for them in the river jungle. After the affair, sir—you are to go with Mademoiselle and parley with the Spanish captain."

"And you?" Mademoiselle cried again breathlessly and sprang erect upon the sands. "You and your men can not stay here to die!"

Monsieur Sazarac smiled with a high serenity. "The sea is wide, Mademoiselle Lestron. Wide, and far is the way to its secret places. I have a mind I said this once to you. A little place in the sea—a secret place, where a secret may be buried, Mademoiselle." He turned to the younger man: "You will make ready to go, Monsieur, when the hour comes. There are two black men of our company who can pull the longboat for you under a flag of truce . . . two black serving men who will not find the air of Vera Cruz conducive to a fatal malady. The rest of us, I fear, must do without the ministrations of the Spanish viceroy's physician as long as we can —possibly a day or so more, ere the doctor calls for us."

His smile still lingered when De Almonaster came closer, torn by a wild bitterness which he, himself, could not fathom. "Jean," he whispered: "I have not spoken. The choice is hers between you and me—and she might save you from Murillo's men! She

might plead with the viceroy that she loved you—even Lafitte of the black flag!"

"That is a jest," murmured Sazarac absently, "worthy of John Jarvis who played the clown to betray me—a plea for Lafitte's life to Murillo!"

CHAPTER XV

THE BOTTLE EMPEROR RETURNS

STRETCHED on the sand-dunes, with his eye to the sea-glass through which he had patiently scanned the forest shore for an hour, even though the tropical dark was swiftly coming, Nez Coupe grunted to the silent group around him.

"That last shot was the port carriage gun—the twenty-four-pounder—and I heard her speak only once before. Bohon, that's a gunner's ear for you!"

"Jarvis's gun," retorted the Portuguese, and the castaways laughed. "Jarvis's shot that clipped the British bark! There go the Spaniards' small arms again. I say the dons should be fair closing on the decks by now!"

Across the mile-wide lagoon in the still hot dusk the last buccaneers of Lafitte listened to the battle in the forest river. The rattle of musketry, and then the boom of the *Sera-*

phine's carronades. And strange as it fell out, the castaways wished for the Spaniards to win. They had no hope of escape for themselves, but their hatred of Crackley's mutineers was stronger than their hereditary feud with the sea power of the Spanish king.

"A pretty pass if the louts did drive the boats away," growled Bohon. "But, no! The frigate would send more—she's a thirty-four gun vessel, and packed with the king's soldiers bound to the rebel wars. No, bullies—Mad John Jarvis has fired his first shot and his last shot. He'll burn in chains at a yardarm with the others, when the dons fire the ship."

"He will request that they allow him to wear his new waistcoat," muttered the Catalan gunner. And the troubled laugh went about. They knew the Jarvis of the old days. The wine-shop wit, the crony of the smugglers' agents in New Orleans; the one free spirit who came and went between the city and the buccaneers' stronghold at Grand Terre Island—who, now and then, had put to sea with a nameless marauder to lie in the paths of the Spanish merchantmen, but ask-

ing nothing, accepting nothing of the freebooter's spoil; the protégé and mocking friend of the brothers Lafitte of Barataria; the object of unabated protest and surveillance by the fuming port authorities who yet had feared to lay hands upon the court jester of the privateers.

"Jean would have hanged him on the *Seraphine* if the dons had not," said Bohon: "friendship never counted with the chief aboard a ship."

"No, gallows-bird! Jean was sore troubled—I never saw a man so secretly hurt as Jean at this betrayal. Eh, well!—the fool's end has come—and here are we in no better plight."

So the fugitives lay and listened to the distant battle for the rescue ship of Bonaparte. At times, behind the fringe of forest swamp, arose the crash of musket fire, and then the bark of the *Seraphine's* guns. And presently this last ceased; the ragged volleys of small arms burst irregularly, died out, renewed; became single shots blotted out by the tropic silence. The Catalan swung to his feet and tied his bloody head scarf tighter.

"I say it is the end. Murillo's men are swarming over." It seemed that a faint burst of cheering came from under the landward stars. Nez Coupe beckoned to his fellows. "The captain will want the word back at the lady's shelter tent. He will send her and the young gentleman to intercept the Spaniards' boats when they come out the pass to regain the frigate. Now, watch for the fire behind the trees—ye see the red ghost of a good ship!"

But presently the captain, himself, and Beluche, the admiral, came through the deep sand and grass hummocks to this outlying point of the reef.

"You make out that the affair is done?" inquired the former. "No, there is a shot."

They waited silently. The low murmur of the gentle surf on the outer fringe of sand was all the sound upon the utter calm of the night.

"It is over," muttered Bohon. "I would have given my right hand to have seen Crackley cutlassed and flung to the sharks. And Jarvis, the fool—gibing them to the last! The wastrel had his sea fight, eh?"

The leader's dark face winced. He raised

his hand as if to still this jesting about the jester of the rue Royale, the Emperor of the Bottle, who, at last, did sit in the chair they had ordained for an emperor himself.

"Come, you," he muttered. "There is much to do. You die here—all of you upon this sand, without doubt. The Spaniards will spy us out to-morrow and there is no man of us all who cares to fall into their hands alive."

"The longboat," whispered Clark, the fair young English lad, staring wide-eyed into the dark. "We might work away down the coast, sir, to some port!"

"There is not a friendly hand upon these shores, or in all the ports, lad." Lafitte turned to the English boy. "Come, tell me, now! Why did you desert the king's ship, and dirty an honest seaman's card for this evil?"

"It—" Clark stammered painfully as if to comprehend this qualm in the notorious Lafitte. "Well, it was to join you, sir. I had heard of you—it seemed a fair, last adventure to find Jean Lafitte!"

Monsieur Sazarac smiled: "Come, then! Lafitte gives you a chance. I choose you as coxswain of the longboat that bears Madem-

oiselle Lestron. A lad—an English lad, may get the protection of an English woman."

"And the two blacks at the oars," added Johanness. "The rest!—eh, *bien!*" He looked about with a vast pride: "We stand with Jean! The last stand o' the last men o' the *Petral,* here with the Captain Jean!"

The captain looked at him in the starlight. Here, indeed, on this waterless reef of the desolate shore of Campeche, ragged, hungry, ill-armed, the last buccaneers of the long line of New World sea-rovers watched his face questioningly. And he laughed and spoke in the old *patois* of the islands:

"Ho, Slit-Nose! Is that the word? And you, Joe Rigo—Bohon—all of you!"

"You would not have left us for the English woman," growled Bohon. "That is clear as the sunshine! Why, what are we mewling about, like children from whom a sweet is taken? We are not dead men yet—we are stout fellows who yet may raise a prize for you!"

"Yes," muttered another, "once clear o' the woman, and we can face to-morrow with new hearts."

"She shall go for her own sake," the master answered, and a shout went up. Yes, they were uneasy about Jean and the English woman. They had all played in this masque of Sazarac for him, but they feared the English woman. For him they had broken parole, cast away the president's pardon, and set their feet on the trail to yesterday . . . but they had feared at the end, because of the witchery of the English woman. If she placed her white arms about him, pleaded in love, for him to go—what then?

And now, from the sea, there came a single signal gun. The frigate was invisible, standing off the shoals, but they knew a thousand enemies were there.

"Come, sirs," said the chief in quiet authority, "the longboat around the point for the English woman. They shall row to meet the Spaniards in the pass—she shall plead that she and Monsieur de Almonaster were the prisoners of the mutineers."

When he had gone from the men who hastened at his bidding, he came upon Mademoiselle Lestron on the highest point of the sand before her shelter-canvas. She was

alone, and she saw his quick glance about. "Monsieur de Almonaster has gone to the beach—I sent him away," she said quietly.

"Away? Do you see that light, Mademoiselle, against the forest? It means the Spanish boat crews are returning. They have taken the *Seraphine* in the river's mouth. You can guess what has happened?—there is no man living who was upon her."

"The ragged man," she answered intently. "The man who sat in the emperor's cabin and kissed the bracelet I left there?"

"The bracelet?" He was surprised; he had not known of this.

"It belonged, once, to Marie Antoinette," she went on passively. "The queen gave it to a member of my family for a service before they put her to the guillotine."

"Why, then, did you not speak when we left the ship? He—he—the man would have given it to you."

"I did not think," she murmured. "He—had his lips to it." Then she was silent, looking at the empty sea, the savage land. "I inquired of Monsieur de Almonaster . . . he laughed painfully, and would not answer. I

could not see the man's face that night. Nor when he jested on the quarter-deck. But always it has seemed that some laughing spirit was near me on the *Seraphine*—a ghost far-off from me, yet ever holding me in his fancy. Is it not strange? I can not shake this feeling off."

"It is strange," he answered. "But come—you are going now."

"Monsieur Sazarac!" she cried sharply. "Why do you not speak?"

"Of what?" he said simply, in no wonder.

"Ah, I do not know!" The stars showed the paleness of her face, her luminous eyes wide up to him. The web of silence that had been woven about her was a mesh that neither tears nor challenge had yet pierced.

"I, too, am a nameless ghost," he smiled, "the ghost of a man who might have been! Come, now! Monsieur Sazarac bids you respectfully—but firmly, to go. You will obey—Monsieur Sazarac is accustomed to being obeyed. . . . The hands of Monsieur Sazarac have been stained with the blood of those who chose not to obey. Is that enough about Monsieur Sazarac, Mademoiselle?"

He turned away to her little tent. She heard him giving instructions to the silent black steward who had been charged to her service.

The tiny light against the unseen forest shore was growing plainer. She heard a brushing in the coarse grass. Raoul de Almonaster drew out of the starlight and stopped by her with a comment. Apparently he did not notice Monsieur Sazarac at her tent seeing to her few belongings.

"He came to you, did he not?" murmured Raoul. "It is the last moment. I gave him this to speak to you, Louise."

"Why, what should he speak?" she whispered. "But then—he would not!"

The younger man misinterpreted. "He loves you, and he would not speak. Eh, well! It is my honor to keep from him—and from you. I was his first confidant—from the very first. When he was about to challenge Carr, because of you, I offered to second him at the Oaks. From the first, he spoke of you—and he had my pledge of honor. Ah, but I did not know then who the lady was—the pawn of his game at Maspero's—the lady he must

retrieve from the *Genaron!* Monsieur Sazarac —at the parting of the paths, one on to peace, even, perhaps, to honor for a wounded name —chose this to serve you, though he knew it meant the abyss opened for him! Is not that a love, Mademoiselle, that would hold the friend of Sazarac to his honor?"

"Tell me—" she whispered swiftly, "the ragged fellow in the emperor's cabin—his jests, his love—"

"A dead man, telling neither love nor jests—" Then the young man turned hotly on her. "See, here! The boat is making ready! Well, if Sazarac has your heart, Louise, I will not go!"

"Oh, no!—no—no!" she breathed. "Monsieur—"

The figure of Monsieur Sazarac loomed against the stars before them.

"Pardon," he said smoothly. "It is the time for the longboat."

"It is damnable!" De Almonaster sprang to grasp his sleeve: "Sir, a woman's part for me! I will not go!—I will not go!"

Monsieur Sazarac looked from him to Mademoiselle Lestron intently. It was as

open to them as a blown rose to the sunshine —De Almonaster would not creep away, saved by a woman's skirts among the Spaniards, and ever after see in her eyes that she was holding in memory another man who died for her.

Monsieur Sazarac smiled, rubbed his slender, bronzed hands. "Come—my children!"

"There is the boat," muttered De Almonaster sullenly. "The blacks at the oars, and Clark at the tiller. The tide is coming out—it is an easy pull. Here is my handkerchief for the truce flag on a boat-pole." He bowed quietly: "Mademoiselle Lestron is going to the Spanish captain's care."

"Sir?" said Sazarac coolly. "*You*—to that boat!"

A stealthy slur of steel and leather came in the silence. They saw the point of De Almonaster's rapier flash dimly and then held to the sand.

"Monsieur Sazarac, I had the idea long ago that, at some hour, you and I should fight. It was as inevitable as anything could be. It was written by these stars at the birth of each of us . . . as it was written that we each

should love a woman whom it has been given us in our lives, to protect. Mademoiselle Lestron to the boat—then, draw, with me, Monsieur!"

The older man did not stir. Twice, then, in so short a time, he must decline a challenge because of her! It was very odd—he laughed slowly.

Mademoiselle had seemed dumb for the moment. Then she sprang, with a hand raised before De Almonaster's blazing eyes and impetuous arm.

But no one of them spoke. They could hear the rattle of gear in the longboat, the low voices of the free blacks. The armed exiles were apart on a distant sand-dune, awaiting the master's disposition of this disturbing affair of the English woman. A moment more and they would be shaken free of her, the old leader among them again, facing the day to come with a light reckless heart as in the *Black Petral's* time. They would be gladdened by the sight of him . . . if it was the last stand for Lafitte's men, why they were here, all who counted, and he with them!

"Well, then," went on Monsieur Sazarac

quietly, "first, the lady for whom we must fight—to the longboat, Monsieur de Almonaster."

Her cry of terror echoed.

There came then, a slow uncertain trudging through the reef grass. The figure of a man quite close. It was stooped; and presently it staggered or stumbled, rather ridiculously, it appeared, over an empty scabbard which got between its knees.

Then it came on, stopped, indeed, fair between the gentlemen, looking with confused wonder from one to the other. The ragged man put a hand to his matted hair and wrung out blood from the tangle; and seemed then, more confused at this.

"Jarvis!" cried De Almonaster, and sprang to him.

"Eh—Raoul?" The voice came weakly but gathered strength as if from some choked but over-mastering purpose: "Well, I came to find you!" After that he staggered back and would have fallen if De Almonaster had not eased him to the sand. Then he rubbed a bloody hand across a bloody face and drawled sleepily: "Swords out— what's the matter?

I say!—what the devil?" He twisted about painfully. "I'm run through twice, I think—"

The captain had come swiftly to him. "Jarvis!" He knelt and sternly sought the other's eyes. "Monsieur de Almonaster, will you get the brandy from the tent? What is this, Jarvis? What of the *Seraphine?* How came you here?"

"She is coming out on the tide," said Jarvis thickly. "The dons think to save her as a prize. Four boats are towing. Name o' God! Jean!— I had my fight!"

"Tell me this," retorted the other coldly. He looked about. The figure of the woman was dim by the tent. She was assisting De Almonaster at the chest of bandages and scanty supplies given them by the mutineers. "Jarvis! You deserted me—but, tell me of the *Seraphine!*"

"I, alone, escaped. Crackley's men fought like wild savages when the end came. The last of us took overboard to the jungle when the Spaniards swarmed aboard. They beheaded Black Mike on a gun-block, and hanged Budge to the shrouds with a fire under him. They chopped old Mariano, arm

by arm and leg by leg—and Crackley shot himself to keep away from them. I—was the last who fell in the river reeds. They did not find me, Jean, and when I got sense after these wounds, I crawled to the water's edge. I found a dinghy with three dead Spaniards in it, and heaved them out. Then I floated with the tide. It bore me to the reef—I knew you would be here somewhere. Curse me, it was a fight! There must have been a hundred of them and we did for half!"

De Almonaster forced the brandy to his lips. "Thank you, Monsieur," murmured the painter of the rue Royale. "This thrust through my shoulder—I would not have had it, but, after breaking a don's head, I saw a bottle roll across the deck. I must after it like a cat at the cheese, and some other king o' Spain's man put a saber to me. Eh, I dropped the cognac with the cork undrawn—got around and fought again. What luck one has!"

He sighed wearily. His eyes closed. The English woman came nearer, and then at a sign from Monsieur Sazarac, she went apart from them. It would not do for the babbler

to talk too much in her hearing. And so, once more, the ragged lover with the new waistcoat did not see the lady of the camellia, nor she him; for when his eyes opened there were but the stars above, and the two men's faces watching close to his.

"Come, gentlemen!" He struggled to a sitting posture between them: "I came here with an idea! A most excellent idea!"

"Jarvis," retorted the captain quietly, "you are dying."

"Eh, *bien!* Are you a physician, too, Monsieur Saz-a-rac, as well as a bully-swordsman, a fellow of pearl-inlaid pistols; a delicate hand at the cards—and wondrous speeches on a lady's staircase?"

He sat up straighter and shook himself. "Dying? Now, see!"

He kicked out both mud-swathed legs, clapped his hands, put a thumb to his nose and wiggled his fingers at the stars. "Let me up," he drawled absently. "I am to tell you what to do. Where the devil is the boat, and our blusterers? Name o' God!—buccaneers snoozing in the grass, and John Jarvis in a bloody set-to!"

And despite their protests he did get to his feet unsteadily. About all they could see were his two eyes sticking out of a muck of wet tangled hair. But these seemed to smile comfortingly.

"Jarvis, and his deck o' blood," he mused. "Now, come. The *Seraphine* is towing out the pass. There is hardly a man on her except the wounded and the officers, for they have every arm at the sweeps in the small boats. I say—we shall retake her, gentlemen!"

They stared at him unbelievingly. He threw out an arm, kicked the entangling scabbard from his knees and blustered on:

"Sixteen there must be of you! Six muskets Crackley gave to you—and you have pistols and cutlasses around. Sixteen, fair-armed and desperate, and a longboat in the dark! If you remain here Murillo's men will leave you all to the buzzards to-morrow—I know, I heard them say there were men of Lafitte alive on this reef!"

"They know?" muttered the chief.

"They guess! I say, we can retake the schooner!—the prize guard on her is nothing

—the *teniente* in command can suspect nothing! Once they lay her astern the frigate there is no hope for any of you—"

"We were to send Mademoiselle to the frigate in the longboat," murmured Raoul.

"Throw her to the sharks—they're kinder than Murillo's men! The Spaniards think the schooner was bound to the rebel republics of the south. They will spare none who had to do with her—they blot out every life that could tell of her taking!"

He swung an empty pistol holster and tottered back and forth. Monsieur Sazarac tapped De Almonaster on the shoulder.

"It is the truth. It is a chance. Monsieur, our affair—we shall have to postpone it. And damn your hot head! . . . Will you understand nothing?"

"Give me this action! Let me be the first to board the *Seraphine*—I shall show you, Monsieur Sazarac, if I am one to be sent away under the protection of a woman!"

"*Nom de Dieu!* And for that you would fight me!" breathed the other softly. Then he turned away, hastening to the outlaws down the sand spit.

Jarvis had sat down again. He watched the light in the south—the Napoleon ship, drawing slowly out on the ebb-tide, with the Spanish king's men at the tow-lines.

"If they get a wind," mumbled Jarvis, "we are undone. Then I might as well have stayed and died in the grass. I came to save you all—"

"John!" cried De Almonaster, "what madness seized you to turn upon him at the pinch?"

"Eh?" The jester fumbled for the brandy bottle. "I was of a mind to play this Sazarac —to swagger if but once across a quarter-deck, to bawl down at some fool holystoning the planks; to cock an eye up at the weather, though, God knows—the weather I could wish would be a shower o' liquor!"

"You wrecked us all—"

"I saved you all—" grunted Jarvis indifferently. "The dogs plotted to turn on Sazarac from the moment she—the—well—" he seemed plaintively diffident at her name—"well, the affair of the *Genaron*. I knew it. They hardly kept it from me, after the rum I broached for them. And once the—she—

came aboard there was no hope to stop trouble. I played the fool for them; I roared chanteys in the fo'cas'le— I outdrank the best o' them! I made myself, as you saw—the blanket adviser to them."

"You let them put her adrift from the ship!" said Raoul sternly.

"Yes—to save her from John Crackley. To save you all from walking the plank. Well—" he grunted absently. "I see. You are not grateful. No one is grateful. I play the part of a Sazarac—save that I can not walk with a sword between my legs—I boast, and pose and swagger . . . that is, I try, Monsieur. You recall the other night? I—alone on the quarter-deck—quite had the stage to myself? I was doing well until my damned pistol went off quite by accident. Discomfited, I hurried below and drank and ate everything that had been spread for the four of you at the emperor's table. Eh—what did the—she—think of me, Monsieur?"

"She," whispered Raoul hurriedly, "apparently never saw you. That is, I believe she laughed—once—at something."

"Name o' God!" breathed the jester. "Ah,

well, of course! She laughed when she saw me hanging to the lamp-post. On the staircase—well, I could not see plainly. In fact, I never see her plainly. Or she, me. Of course—I am the ghost . . . I try to strut out in the brave light, but there seems laughter always . . . tilt up the bottle, Raoul—give me the last of it!"

"You are sore wounded, John. Lie back. Listen! The bullies are coming. They will make the attack you planned. But you are weak, John."

"Three wounds—" mused the other airily. "Still, I must not be dead. I feel the cognac running out the holes the dons put in me. Help me!—I must be up! There is Saz-a-rac . . . and is that—the—she—?"

He seemed suddenly startled to discover a white cloak so close to him. In fact, he seemed to hustle uncertainly from it around to the outer edge of the group that gathered about Sazarac and Mademoiselle. And if she saw him at all; or divined that the fellow of the waistcoat was really this bloody figure that had staggered to them but a moment since, it was plain that he vanished from her sight shortly. He had, indeed, meant to

stretch a hand of authority, seeing that the mad plot was his; to ring out a swift and pregnant campaign worthy of a pistoling Sazarac, but now he couldn't. He merely hung off in the grass hummocks, swamp mud and his own blood dripping from him, dangling an empty holster, and listening with mouth agape. She put this spell upon him, it must have been that at once, in her presence, he became a ghost of a man, pursuing his tattered mask of a Sazarac through his dreams.

Certain it is that, after the leader had told of the thing to be done, and of Jarvis's coming to them, there was such a puzzled, and then a shouting acclaim for the plan, that every one forgot the author of it.

"By Blackbeard himself!" roared Bohon. "It is a scheme that Jean Lafitte would have loved!"

"Taking the vessel back amidstream—swarming up the chains, and at them!" chuckled Johanness. "Name o' the devil! It is the old luck o' the *Petral!*"

"I never had a mind we'd rot on this reef," laughed a third. "Not with this—Saz-a-rac to command!"

They scattered to the bushes for their few

arms and ammunition boxes. Others were working the longboat from the shoals to where the adventurers could wade as she settled with the load of them in deeper water. There was hushed laughter, grim confidence, a jousting, nudging loyalty to the quiet leader. Two huge fellows carried Mademoiselle Lestron from the sands to the boat, in a chair formed of their brawny arms. Then they pushed the longboat slowly, stealthily out to catch the run of the ebb-tide.

"Not a man-jack of us will live if the rush fails," growled Bohon, at the tiller. "Now lay to, and kill the drip o' oars—and not a breath till we come under the counter and Sazarac gives the boarding word!"

"Sazarac," whispered De Almonaster. He was on a mid-thwart with Mademoiselle Lestron at his side. His hand sought hers in the close press of the adventurers crowded in the longboat. She did not resist . . . but she did not return his pressure. She was merely calm, watchful, trusting to the skill and courage of Sazarac.

"Sazarac," breathed another one, huddled up in the bow at the feet of Nez Coupe who

held the boarding-hook. "Name o' God! If I had a sword—but I haven't a sword—" And the jester rubbed his dried blood off his cheek. . . . He remembered that, at his first and last sea-fight, on the deck of the *Seraphine*, he had killed two Spaniards but with the oaken stave of a discarded rum barrel.

As for the present exploit he had his empty holster, a curious slow stiffening of his wounds, and intolerable cravings in his stomach for food and drink. He tried to dwell on something else except the smell of swamp mud and being hungry.

"There's her tops'il above the mist," hissed the Catalan lookout. "Ease off. A wind—a touch of air—is fatal to us! In, lads—I hear their haul-boats above us. Come, there's her bulk in the fog!"

They saw the bloom of ghostly, idle sail against the stars. Now the dim black line along the water; and then a voice on the deck. About the wheel there must be a group of tired officers of the Spanish king's navy waiting for a cap of wind to aid the prize from the shoal coast.

De Almonaster felt a pressure on his hand. He bent his head.

"Monsieur—your pistol. Give it to me—I will not fall in their hands alive—if we fail!"

"We will not fail," he whispered moodily. "Why—with Sazarac?"

She wondered if the silent leader at the stern had caught this bitter tribute? There was no more speech for any of them. The girl was staring now, between the press of crouched figures, at the great limp disorder of the snowy sails; it seemed but another moment when the muffled oar blades shot the longboat fair under the schooner's stern. Old hands trembled on long unused weapons; there seemed a muttering and a nodding of heads . . . and then a slight jar, the snap of a hook on a wooden rail, and up and to the *Seraphine's* deck there slid a dozen silent figures, cutlass cords in teeth, fingers to triggers.

De Almonaster writhed with impatience awaiting his turn. A terrified howl had arisen from some wounded sailors lying in the schooner's waist, who first caught sight of the swarming figures in the land mist.

The huge Johanness was the first to reach the wheel. The two officers of the king o' Spain had hardly turned surprised faces at the footfalls ere they died gasping under his two cutlass swings. The helmsman cried out and an iron pike crashed to his teeth.

And amidships a battle was arising. Frightened howls, incoherent commands from fleeing petty officers; while above it, now, came the wild yell of the gulf buccaneers in other days and evil:

"A-Barataria! A-Barataria! Lafitte! Lafitte!"

To that cry these castaways had swarmed chains and shrouds of many a ship now long missing in the ports of the world.

Save for one obscure figure, the longboat held none except Mademoiselle Lestron. She shrank lower, closing her ears against the screams and shots of the battle which had thickened forward. The towing boats had turned on the hawsers; they were coming back. The Spanish king's men arose at the bows, attempting to climb and save their helpless comrades.

The shots and cries and trampling went

on, and the girl shuddered at the sounds. Who was winning, what had happened to her friends, she could not tell. But slowly there was a stir in the bow-thwarts. A tall man arose, rubbing his eyes as if awakened from a dispiriting sleep. He stared about—she could just see him dimly in the starlight, and then he climbed awkwardly, with frantic haste but slowly after all—to the boarding-ladders.

He got over the rail with some difficulty, and then stopped as if considering what he should do next. Louise's startled eyes could not make out his face but his uncouth movements seemed familiar . . . if she could only see his eyes—whether they were light or dark—or the contour of his face, perhaps, she could know . . . then he staggered and fell.

The girl upstarted. The cries and imprecations seemed growing in volume, coming nearer, as if the attackers were being driven back. But she began to climb the nearer boarding-ladder. When she came over the rail she saw first an indistinct group of struggling men forward, with here and there the flash of fire; and then, near her on the deck,

under the dim light by the main companionway, a man crawling along.

At the companionway he got to his feet with some trouble and disappeared below. The girl ran back of the after-housing to get away from a dying Spaniard at her feet. There she found three other bodies, and the smooth planks were slippery under her feet. She fled the other way from these horrors and then found herself by the open skylight of the main cabin.

It was brilliantly lighted there. Apparently all the fury of the two battles for the *Seraphine* had never penetrated to the heavy splendor of rosewood, silken tapestries and ormolu encased mirrors of the emperor's suite. For at the emperor's table sat the ragged man she had seen there once before. He was in the huge, carved, pretentious chair at the head of the board. He rather shone with blood from a scalp wound under his matted hair. Also, she saw that he appeared to be picking over the bones of some remnants of a dish that must have been prepared for Crackley's lieutenants earlier in the day. At any rate the lone guest showed disappoint-

ment. He reached for the cognac, and then lit a long reed pipe he found on the board. Then he sat back and smoked, listening to the distant sounds of the battle forward and above on the decks of the Napoleon ship.

Mademoiselle Lestron turned away with fearful curiosity. She encountered a hurrying group coming past the main-mast. Panting, stumbling, smoke-grimed men, among whom she saw the tall Sazarac. He sprang to the side as if to see to the safety of the English woman left in the longboat.

"Monsieur!" she cried, and ran to him frightenedly.

"There is no man of them left in arms!" he shouted, with a brightening eye. "The port watch went overboard at our rush, swimming for their boats. The boats themselves are beaten back. Beluche is tumbling their wounded to a yawl that remains. Mademoiselle," he bowed to her, "you will go below away from these abominable sights. Come —the *Seraphine* is won!"

"No—no!" she gasped in horror still. "No —not yet!"

Sazarac turned from her for an instant to the wheel where an altercation seemed aris-

ing. Old Dominique had taken it; he was shouting, with his eyes aloft. "She is drawing at the top!" the fat seaman bawled. "A man to her shrouds! A man—give me one man!"

A silence had come, strangely silent, after the fury. A groan or two, a coughing fellow forward in the lee scuppers. Dominique was howling once more.

"Damnation! She's drawing! We'll be on the sands with this! A seaman for Dominique! Where are ye all?"

The Count de Almonaster suddenly appeared past the tangle of cordage along the starboard rail where dead men were twisted into rope and grimed sail cloth. He threw away a broken small sword and came on.

"Mademoiselle!"

"I am not hurt," she said faintly. "You—Monsieur!"

The roaring of Dominique, the alderman of New Orleans, cut him off.

"Curse me!—fat—heavy as a lout—and here a sea fight such as my old eyes have dreamed! A ship o' blood! A ship o' death! —twice in one day has she been cleared o' the dead louts fallen on her!"

Forward, indeed, a man was heaving corpses to the phosphorescent waters. Yet the ship seemed curiously still. She was drawing on, with Dominique hauling at the wheel; slowly, and with a sighing fill of limp canvas, a weary clatter of blocks . . . sailing, somehow, in unseamanlike disorder, but out of the rippling shallows.

And to the west a heavy gun broke with a spurt of fire. They heard the shot ride sullenly into the sand spit on the port quarter.

"A man aloft!" bawled Dominique. "Break out wi' stays! What's the matter wi' ye all?"

Two had gone aloft. Clark, the young English lad, and Gorgio, the Catalan. The latter was crawling up slowly, a hand to shroud and cat-line. By the light they could see him faintly. Grim, bloody-faced, responding to his last order.

"A-Barataria!" he howled. "La—"

The *Seraphine* suddenly heeled with a puff of wind that came as she cleared the shoals. It shook the wounded buccaneer from his failing grasp on the rigging. But even in mid-air, Gorgio, the Catalan, repeated his call of the old days; then his body heaved out and

plunged to the opalescent waters, streaking like a comet to the depths.

"Damnation!" growled Dominique. "Is this a dead ship? Where are the bullies that I raise not a man? Monsieur de Almonaster! Captain Sazarac! I lay a course—now have this ship worked!"

"Lay her as she is, old gabbler," retorted Sazarac. "Starboard a bit—the mist is closing on the Spaniard, and he can not stir in the air that moves this beauty! A long trick at your wheel, Dominique!"

Still the rotund politician would not understand. "Our lads—" he fumed. "If I take the deck I want something to work with, Monsieur—Sazarac!"

De Almonaster was holding his arm through whose sleeve the blood would spout despite his efforts. Louise Lestron stared in a wild disbelief from the shadowy disorder forward on the schooner to the master.

When Sazarac spoke, it appeared to be to her: "There are none left—you have seen the last men of a vanished race. You have seen men die in honesty. For you, Mademoiselle—for a woman, at which they would

have laughed; for the peace of the world, which they would have scorned! It is a strange thing you see—I and old Dominique alone on this bloody deck—alone more than any human heart can know!"

The two gentlemen took her to the cabin, while the crippled schooner fled on a blinded path, anywhere to be out from the guns of the king o' Spain. They took her to the emperor's suite; and Monsieur de Almonaster found bread and meat for her; and Monsieur Sazarac held wine to her lips.

There, also, the gentlemen discovered a thing which they did not report to Mademoiselle. They closed the door softly to the cabin, and tried to make a jest of all the terrors that came with the taking of the *Seraphine.*

In the tapestry-hung stateroom, with his boots on and his blood-stained head deep in the pillow, the Emperor of the Bottle lay upon Bonaparte's bed once more. He might be sleeping, or he might be dead . . . the gentlemen could not take time to discover with so many other grim questions mounting to the eyes of each across the emperor's board.

Be that as it may, the Emperor, having reached the privacy of his chamber, flatly refused to leave it again, even though his lady of the camellia was now just outside the paneled door.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LOOT OF A BUCCANEER

"THERE is much to wash away, Monsieur," commented De Almonaster, at the deck pump. He paused to watch the sea water that scoured along the deck and into the scuppers leeward. "Faithful old blood, Monsieur."

"The ship must be put so that Mademoiselle may come forward," answered Sazarac. "We have done all that two sore men may do. Clark is worn with his sailorman's shift aloft. The schooner is making fair with this wind following, but we can hardly handle her with anything else."

"Beluche is dead," observed De Almonaster, still in the same detached manner. "Johanness will not live the hour out. *Nom de Dieu!* Think of it! The way one must regard it—nothing to be done for them. Mademoiselle is sitting with him on the weather side. He will not be moved. He

swears he will pass with the salt spray stinging over him."

"What more could a man of the sea ask?" answered Sazarac. "Come—we shall go to him. No pity for him, mind—he would curse you for it."

The shortened sail was snapping in a clear morning breeze which worried Dominique, still at his trick with the wheel, which was all that a rotund alderman, his knees too much sagged with fat living, might attempt. A fair morning, and a following sea; with not a sail in sight. Pursuit, even from the heavy-footed Spanish troop-ship might have gone badly with the two-hundred-ton schooner, short-handed as she scampered on.

The two gentlemen who had been gravely washing down the decks, came about the low housing to where the bo'sun lay. The deck was wet, the dying buccaneer was wet; Mademoiselle Lestron looked up, the shaggy head with its huge gold earrings, pillowed on her lap; and her face was wet also—a sparkle lent by the sea and the fountains of her woman's compassion.

She turned from her ministrations with a

wan smile: "He will not be moved, Messieurs!"

"Old robber—" muttered Sazarac; "stubborn to the end, eh?"

"It is my place—here in the weather. I am no quarter-deck gentry nor mewling 'prentice to be laid below in the doctor's room for all a thrust or two."

"Johanness, you are going soon," answered the chief gravely.

"That is what I wanted of you. Send away the English woman—" and though he growled this, when she had arisen he looked about at her from under his gray bushy brows and smiled. "I want to lie wi' you a moment, and look at the flying tops. You will need to shorten sail, and I rage that I can not spring to the tops again. Name o' God!—a seaman on his back and loose blocks clattering! . . . Is the English woman gone?"

"She is well away with Monsieur de Almonaster."

"Good! Now, you are Lafitte, and not this woman's Sazarac. It is this, Jean. In my shrimper's camp back at La Caminada there is a packet in my sea chest. It tells of plunder

that Crump and De Jonville and I buried on Cozumel twenty years ago. Some gold, some silver and a handful of jewels. The two others have been dead long since; and I wish the stuff for you—"

"I can never return to Louisiana, Johanness," said the leader gently.

"Eh? Well, that is so!" The old man's voice was breaking lower. He turned his face to watch the white spume arise along the weather rail, the highest glitter of it striking his face. "Well, let me be, my Captain! I wish to lie alone staring at the dizzy tops. Naught but them against the blue and the sea weathering up at me. Now—let be, Jean!"

The master put his hand back on his breast and walked aft. The weary group by the steersman looked questioningly up.

"Let no one go near him. It is his wish. I shall roll him from the chains. That, too, is his wish. I—alone!"

And again the girl looked wonderingly at him. "What are you to them all, Monsieur? That rough men turn to you in this fashion, as I have seen them die—the priest, the brother and the comrade?"

"A name," he said, and smiled; and then would say no more.

Louise had bound up De Almonaster's sorely-wounded arm. Now they all lay in the shelter of the after-housing, save the lad, Clark, who had taken the wheel. Old Dominique, Monsieur Sazarac and Count de Almonaster with the English woman.

The creak and haul of the gear in the freshening wind was all the sound, and Dominique croaked his misgivings.

"A sore wild night for us all, hearties, if it keeps on. And another mystery there may be for the coffee-houses, and that is the end of the *Seraphine* and the yelling bullies who stole her from the Place d'Armes! I trust the Mayor Rouiffignac will put flowers on my desk in the council chamber."

They tried to smile for the sake of Mademoiselle. Now and then, with a curious little frowning fear, she had glanced down the raised skylight to the cabin of the emperor. It was, indeed, as if she was watching there for an apparition. At times she would have asked of the ragged man she saw there in the chair of honor with the scalp wound that had

given him something the appearance of one who wore a red coronet and jauntily; but always the two gentlemen had courteously evaded her.

The two gentlemen had conferred apart, now and then; reservedly, perhaps, but with common honesty.

"You would make the Mississippi passes with this ship, Monsieur?" inquired De Almonaster. "It appears quite impossible that we should!"

"It is quite possible to try, Monsieur de Almonaster."

"There is Amelia Island," mused Monsieur de Almonaster. "It is still a haunt for the privateers, but since the United States are bargaining for the Floridas, I doubt if it would be healthy for us over-long?"

"What is in your mind, Monsieur?" retorted Sazarac dryly.

"Your life again. Granting this short-handed vessel can be brought to the Mississippi, there is an answer we must make for this affair."

"There is the answer I made to Mademoiselle Lestron."

"True—true!" The younger man shrugged. "There is, in addition, my honor that the *Seraphine* yet sail on the mission for the emperor. There are gentlemen in New Orleans with money in this venture. If a crew could be shipped by any means—"

Monsieur Sazarac laughed aloud. At the end it amused him—this punctilious regard each had for honor—his own and the other man's, and each for the other's life and future. That was what Mademoiselle Lestron had put upon them, this meticulous notion to stand aside rather than overreach.

"Come," he said good-humoredly. "Is there a quarrel in us, Monsieur?"

"In the end she will know you are Jean Lafitte," went on De Almonaster evenly. "But it is not I who should tell her. Is not that fair?"

"I will bow to her from the gallows the governor will erect in the Place d'Armes, and announce myself, if needs be," said Monsieur Sazarac.

"Jean!" the younger man sprang up hotly. "This is no jesting! She loves you!"

"A ghost—Sazarac," smiled the other. "Ah,

indeed, this is worthy of the man who lies below in the suite of Napoleon, babbling a glory which is compounded of fever and cognac! What is there to love in Sazarac, once the mask is torn from him?"

"That is the point of it," retorted the other soberly. "One can love a mask . . . a woman can go on forever loving the illusion she deems a man to be!"

"The irons she will see upon Monsieur Lafitte in New Orleans will not be an illusion." The master smiled again detachedly: "This romantic fancy of hers for Sazarac! Go below—ask Monsieur Jarvis who has suffered for her, bled for her, saved her life—and refuses to be anything but the veriest mystery and illusion to her! He refuses to be anything more. . . . My friend, Jarvis, is very wise. Monsieur Sazarac can go no further than the gallows in the Place d'Armes, and there smile down at her regretting he is not himself."

"Ah, well!" the young man started up bitterly. "I can make nothing of it! I love her, Monsieur Lafitte—and she loves the magic of Sazarac!"

He arose and paced the wet deck, wincing as the swordthrust through his left arm cut him under the dressing her hands had made for it. She saw him from her cushioned perch by the steersman. Dominique had taken the trick again, and sent the lad, Clark, to the lookout. A fine hot youth Raoul de Almonaster had come to be under the press of the eventful fortnight since the *Seraphine* fled from the river's mouth; the languid aristocrat of the sugar plantations had flung against the steel of Monsieur Sazarac and tempered to a man.

She would have called him and tried to win him from his moods, but she feared the flame of him . . . she could hardly fail to guess why his sword had leaped from its sheath on Campeche reef; and surely the *Seraphine* had seen enough of men's passions and their blood.

And Monsieur Sazarac, too, had his moods again. He found affairs to keep him busied, as, indeed, well a sailor might on this man-crippled schooner; but once, happening to glance down the cabin skylight, with her incessant curiosity, she saw him there. He

stood in deep thought, it appeared. Then he went to the door of the emperor's stateroom, and rapped upon it with his silver sword hilt. She thought he laughed slightly, as a man who had thought upon a serious matter until it became amusing.

The door opened. She could not tell by whom, but Monsieur Sazarac bowed with an accentuated flourish. There was a sardonic smoothness to this bow; and Sazarac entered the emperor's chamber. The door closed, and for an hour nothing happened in the cabin. It irritated Mademoiselle Lestron. A mystery with grim laughter in it . . . about all the blood and death and fire of the weeks there had seemed grimacing mirth.

Wise nods and chuckles—rough jesting, truculent whisperings aside; grumbling humor at the name of him: the mutineers had had the jest; the silent, loyal men had it—the complacent alderman, Monsieur de Almonaster—Sazarac himself . . . every one a jester, like the mysterious figure, the man who was always slipping from her to the shadows.

Even the dying, wounded fellows, over-

whelmed by the boarding Spaniards on the port bow last night; that, too, was a jest, for if the king's men had made one more assault the *Seraphine* would have been theirs again. The swords of Monsieur de Almonaster and Monsieur Sazarac were the only ones against them when they broke back to their boats. The last dead of the *Seraphine* lay in a close row before the fo'cas'le hood—Beluche, the admiral; Nez Coupe, the riven-faced; Bohon, the smuggler; Joe Rigo of Isle Grande; Freniere and two others; a fallen rank to which, presently, she saw Monsieur Sazarac carry the last—the bo'sun, Johanness.

Then the master stood bareheaded in the sun and looked them over. He seemed satisfied; he took a deck-broom and swept around them carefully, as if these were a treasure heaped on the schooner's spray-lashed bow; and then he came aft. Mademoiselle Lestron saw that he carried a number of shabby things. A drenched velvet cap, a broken pistol, a faded sash, a cutlass and a gold earring from the bo'sun's head. With these he went down the main companionway to the emperor's cabin, knocked on the door and then entered. The door closed.

She glanced at Alderman Dominique drowsing at the wheel. The flapping canvas, as the schooner wore off a bit, brought his eyes open.

"Monsieur Dominique! What is going on?" she cried.

"Eh? On?—I trust my head is still on—and remains so? What—"

"What is this play for me?" she broke in passionately.

Monsieur Dominique was looking about vacantly when there came a hail from the forward lookout, Clark, who had spent the hour aloft.

"Sail—Ho! On the weather bow!"

Old Dominique lurched up stiffly. De Almonaster came from his furious pacing amidships. Monsieur Sazarac, presently, from the cabin. The gentlemen gathered about the master's sea-glass. After a while he picked it up clearly.

"A Yankee—and a sloop-of-war, I think. She is laying a course to cross us." Sazarac looked about with some concern.

"American!" cried Raoul eagerly. "Then break out the jack, and run up the national colors also! This is an American ship!"

Sazarac glanced at him oddly. It appeared some sentiment was struggling with expediency. But when Clark came down he was sent to hoist the starred flag of the Washington Republic.

"This is a hard nut to crack," grumbled Dominique. "The story this schooner holds. Not a document aboard . . . and you—Jean!"

Mademoiselle Lestron had turned a glad tired face to the stranger's sail; she did not hear a sudden conference.

"It will not do for them to see him," muttered Monsieur Sazarac. "Nor Mademoiselle Lestron to see him. He is roaring his chanteys—he is telling of his sea fight—he names us all of the old crew, one by one."

"There goes a signal gun." Raoul was watching the strange sail, and the slender figure of Louise Lestron waving an arm as though the Yankees might see. "They mean for us to lay to. Now, we will have to explain."

Mademoiselle had run back to them, her eyes sparkling joyously. She heard the young man's last word, and her keen eyes noted the constrained silence that had fallen on them.

"Your fellow-countrymen, Messieurs of Louisiana! A rescue . . . what is the matter? What is there to explain? This ship, a victim of mutineers?"

She glanced from them to the sloop-of-war sailing swiftly, wind a-beam, to cross the bows of the *Seraphine*. Already, at her masthead, they could see the flag of the North Republic.

"The Napoleon plot," the English woman guessed. "Well that—a ship of His Majesty might seize you all, but I have not heard that the Yankees have ever interfered seriously in this madness of New Orleans to free Napoleon?"

"The emperor," said Monsieur Sazarac darkly, but with his smile, "is in his bed—with his boots on!"

The *Seraphine* was coming around and up in the wind with a clatter of blocks and snapping cloth. Dominique sighed wearily. There was nothing else to do. Monsieur Sazarac, after that last enigmatic jest, looked gravely at the other vessel.

"The *Hornet*—" he shrugged: "Commodore Biddle's famous sloop of the British war.

Lay-to, hearties! You are boarding a mate worthy of a chase if we had other than dead sailormen forward of the mast!"

Dominique watched him sorrowfully. For them all, save Jean Lafitte, there might be explanation, pardon; perhaps, even praise for a gallant exploit.

"She is up in the wind also," muttered De Almonaster. "I see a boat swinging off, and a smart lieutenant's head-gear. Now, Monsieur Sazarac—"

"It depends upon who may be in the Yankee boarding party," said the other indifferently. "There may be old heads there who know me well."

Monsieur Sazarac's short laugh stung the hothead again. He crossed to him at the rail. "Monsieur Sazarac, it is idle to say I will not betray you. There is no one here who can or will, except . . . what is John Jarvis saying now?"

"He instructed, just now: 'Jean Lafitte, fetch the sea boots of Monsieur Sazarac.'"

"Perdition!" fumed De Almonaster. "He will hang you yet! He will hang you yet—even at the last!"

A Paramount Picture.

Captain Sazarac, Photoplay title The Eagle of the Sea.

"SAZARAC" BATTLES THE MUTINEERS.

"A word from him—from any one—naturally—" Monsieur Sazarac took his snuff composedly. "Eh, *bien!* He was my jester in the old days! This entire affair seized his fancy. It was he, it seems, for he boasts of it—who caught a camellia which was once thrown to me from a balcony. Things might have been far different if I had done so, and not he. Well, what would one have? Life depends on the slightest things. And death as well; you see,—if the Emperor of the Bottle had not caught the camellia he might never have been inspired to outswagger Monsieur Sazarac!"

"Her ragged cavalier—" muttered the other: "be still. She must not know. It would be abominable—he, with his cognac, roaring the doggerel of your old black ship! Name of Names! The American boat is under our counter. See to the boarding, Clark!"

A hail had come from the small boat as she sheered off to await the ladder. Then presently, after some difficulty, a young American lieutenant climbed over the rail. He stared bewilderedly down the empty waist of the schooner first, and then to the little

group by the wheel where Monsieur Dominique idly hung.

"Sir, my compliments, and those of Captain Dallas of the American sloop, *Hornet*—but we have orders to stop all sailing craft in the gulf and make inquiry. Besides we saw you were sailing with some trouble—very short-manned and hard-used, it might be. You are —sir?"

"Captain Gaspar Sazarac, sir—acting master." He bowed and stepped nearer with an assuring smile. "The *Seraphine* is largely the property of this gentleman, Monsieur de Almonaster of New Orleans. The lady, sir, is a British subject, whom we took under stress. The victims of a mutiny, sir—as you will see if you look about. I will make you a full report of the affair in writing, if you wish, sir."

The American lieutenant was, indeed, looking about with some curiosity. He saw bullet-riven woodwork and torn sail cloth . . . perhaps even rimming crusts of red along the scuppers. Then he smiled. Dominique gave a soft whistle of relief. The *Hornet*, then, had not sailed from New Orleans. The offi-

cers did not yet know of the affair at the Place d'Armes!

Lieutenant Ramsey's smile deepened upon the gentlemen:

"I can guess, sir! Monsieur de Almonaster is known in Baltimore and Charleston. And this schooner—the *Seraphine,* the famous ship that was to take Napoleon!"

A stir and a shout had come from the Yankee seamen over the rail.

"The Girod ship! I saw her at Charleston ere she was purchased!"

"Aye—the ship bought by the gentlemen of New Orleans! There is no faster in the Indies!"

The lieutenant still smiled doubtfully: "Monsieur de Almonaster, I can assure you you do not appear very dangerous!"

"We speak the truth, sir!" Raoul advanced eagerly, catching at the knowledge that the Americans knew nothing of the stealing of the *Seraphine.* "Our mission ended in mutiny—disaster, as you see about us. Will you detain us, sir? Has Washington ordered any action against our purpose?"

The officer bowed . . . even he, as Madem-

oiselle Lestron noticed, appeared to be inwardly amused:

"But last week, Monsieur de Almonaster, it might have done so on certain representations of the king's ambassador. But now, both England and America are relieved of this momentous issue. For when we left Charleston a clipper had just arrived from Liverpool with despatches. Gentlemen of the *Seraphine*, your fantastic dream is over. The Emperor Bonaparte is dead."

Monsieur de Almonaster gazed dumbly at him for a moment. It appeared, indeed, as if the young gentleman of Louisiana had sustained a blow. Mademoiselle Lestron, Tory and monarchist, disdainful of all the Corsican's lost glory, though she was—gasped a trifle incredulously.

Monsieur Sazarac shrugged as if it was a matter of no moment to a sailing master for the New Orleans gentry. Dominique, alone, gave way to emotion. He blew his red nose loudly.

"Eh—old Bony! Name o' God!—now I will have to go back to mulling over street contracts with the Mayor Rouiffignac!"

"You are therefore absolved from all duty in the affair," continued Lieutenant Ramsey with some irony. "It is very apparent that a vessel crippled as is the *Seraphine* by a mutiny which, luckily, you had the gallant fortune to put down, is in no way fit for a lady. Captain Dallas will be pleased to receive her, and any of the rest who wish transfer, and take you to New Orleans on the *Hornet.* Monsieur de Almonaster has a wound which needs a surgeon. Can we serve you, gentlemen, in this?"

"Naturally you will require a report in writing," suggested Monsieur Sazarac.

"At your leisure, Monsieur." The lieutenant turned away as if to give the refugees a moment to confer upon the matter.

Dominique found chance to pull the sleeve of Monsieur Sazarac. "You can not go to the *Hornet,* Jean! There will be older seamen there who will recognize you. Your head is not worth Beluche's gimcrack cockade. Nor in New Orleans either!"

"Mademoiselle Lestron will accept Captain Dallas' courtesy on the *Hornet,*" observed Monsieur Sazarac, as if he had not heard.

She turned joyously to him. "Why, naturally! And leave this ship of blood and mystery! We shall go, Messieurs!—it is in my heart to go!"

"You hear?" murmured Sazarac to De Almonaster. The count had taken a turn of the deck forward with Lieutenant Ramsey, showing him certain things and explaining earnestly. Now he was back to his party.

"I say this is luck! The *Hornet* is overcrowded with some twenty sailormen taken from a wrecked island trader off Key West on her run down! Jamaicans—some white and some half-breed, but able seamen, Lieutenant Ramsey tells. Captain Dallas will be more than glad to shift this burden, and at the same time provide the working crew which our schooner must needs have in any event! It is admirable. We can stay on her."

But the girl shivered . . . she had been peering curiously down through the skylight where the snowy top of the *Seraphine* against the blue cast wavering colors on the ornate furnishings of the emperor's cabin.

"No—no—Monsieur! On the *Hornet*—"

"On the *Hornet*," repeated Captain Sazarac quietly.

Raoul stopped with a remembrance of Sazarac shadowing his exuberance. "Ah, yes! I see," he went on slowly. "*Nom de Dieu!* It would be the same for you—the *Seraphine* following in the wake of the *Hornet* to New Orleans! Monsieur Sazarac— Ah, well!" He shrugged helplessly: "I can not think what to do for Monsieur Sazarac!"

The girl could not understand, of course. Monsieur Sazarac bowed with some satire.

"This phantom—Sazarac! How it haunts your happiness, Monsieur de Almonaster! Dispel it with a word! A gesture!"

The younger man came to him with a gesture, indeed, but of some humble grief. "I have stood aside. I have spoken no word of love to her . . . I have held my honor. The look in her eyes I have seen—that is for you to-day, if I can not win it fairly!"

"There," murmured Sazarac. "See? She is looking into the cabin—curiously! Eh, a woman! Fascinated by mystery—this or that ghost. Come, be the man, Raoul! Call the lieutenant's guard . . . I am Jean Lafitte!"

"This sword of mine would be at the throat of any man who breathed that name upon this ship. That is my honor still—Sazarac."

"Come! Name of the devil! The lieutenant is fidgeting—he must be back to report this matter. Why, what is the matter with you?" growled Sazarac impatiently. "Take what is in your grasp! The happiness that is in your power—seize it, Monsieur! Honor?—bah! Go down in the emperor's stateroom . . . ask the jester! He would roar the truth of us all to Heaven! It appears that he has protected the good name of Sazarac long enough, and has tired of it. He has, in fact, now called on me to be an honest man. It must be Lafitte, the outlaw, who has the lady's fancy—not a chivalrous Sazarac. And the jester rules, Monsieur—he has come to command at last!"

Monsieur De Almonaster appeared not to understand the other's laughter which must conceal so much of pain. "Jarvis must not see her then," he muttered. "There would be no sense to that!"

Sazarac took the young man's unwounded arm and turned him firmly toward the *Hor-*

net lying up in the wind astern. "Come—I, too, am a ghost. Sazarac is a ghost—he never did exist." And then the old somber look of Lafitte, the fugitive, came to his eyes: "I tell you, Raoul, if we had not just learned that Bonaparte was dead, I would have tried —for a last desperate venture of the last man of my infamous lot—to seize Napoleon. To be at sea! To be under the sky again on a good ship! At the end—too late—your dream grappled me! Monsieur, you see everything else is gone for me," he added. "I depart from the stage. Jarvis would tell you so with his mocking. Ah, God, I envy the dead men up there forward!"

"You love her, then," muttered De Almonaster, "that is plain—"

"Too well to have her see me swing in air at the end. Of course that will be the end—" he said composedly: "and she will know I played a rôle for her merely. I could not be Sazarac more than could John Jarvis."

"You give her up because there is no more to do—for Sazarac," returned the other slowly. "Ah, yes! I am sorry, Monsieur! I am unfair after all, at the end."

And then he suddenly seized the adventurer's bronzed hands. "See, here! Your life? The *Seraphine* will save your life! I give her to you, Monsieur! The crew of shipwrecked mariners—why, in some obscure port of the Indies you can refit and be off before you are identified!"

The older man put back the iron-gray wisp that had come to his black hair above the temples. "Be off—Monsieur?"

"I heard you say the seas are wide, and far—far the way to their secret places. It is a chance, Jean." The count seized his arm, for the lieutenant, whom Mademoiselle Lestron had now joined, was returning to them. "Come! I reimburse the gentlemen of New Orleans who were with me in the Girod venture. I give you the *Seraphine*—without condition."

"Without condition?" Monsieur Sazarac stared oddly at him. Then at Mademoiselle Lestron who had run to them brightly, vivaciously, as if all was arranged, as if the black-hulled schooner and its mysteries would, in an hour, be vanished in the seas . . . and she gladdened at its passing.

"Ah, yes!" Sazarac bowed: "without condition, Monsieur de Almonaster!"

And he bowed again to her, and took her finger-tips and pressed them to his lips. She could not understand this fervor which had a touch of satire. Nor the smile in his somber eyes; his turning away while Monsieur de Almonaster made hurried arrangements with the American lieutenant. Even now they had sent the boat away to apprise the *Hornet,* and to fetch the improvised crew which would be glad for a berth back to the Indies.

Monsieur Sazarac stood idly apart, twirling his sword knot, as if nothing any longer was affair of his. When Alderman Dominique made some query as to the dead seamen forward he shrugged. That was all.

He strolled forward to stare down at the nine dead buccaneers, and did not return until the *Hornet's* boats with a crew of strange half-breed men, and two obsequious, grateful, petty officers, were at the *Seraphine's* side.

While the other party was descending to the small boat he still stood apart. Dominique supposed he was going, dumb hurt as the

alderman was at thought of the chance that an instant cry, "Lafitte!" would ring on the *Hornet's* quarter-deck.

Mademoiselle Lestron thought he was going, for he stood close by the ladder as she was helped away.

But he detained her suddenly at the rail.

"A moment, Mademoiselle—" He exhibited to her a small bracelet. Curiously inlaid, gold of three colors, and a number of pearls . . . the gift of a queen.

Mademoiselle Lestron cried out in joyous wonder. She had never seen Marie Antoinette's bracelet since the night she saw the ragged fellow kiss it in the emperor's cabin, when the mutineers sent her away.

"My bracelet! Monsieur—" All a child's lovely eagerness to grasp a toy was in her face and the hand she reached for it.

Monsieur Sazarac, however, drew it back gravely: "Ah—no!"

"But—my bracelet, Monsieur? I want it!"

"That is the point. It is yours, and you can not have it."

"Nom de Dieu!" She stared at him incredulously. "Why?"

"It must be stolen. It is essential as a matter of honor."

De Almonaster and Dominique were in the small boat. They looked up astonished; and the girl sat down by them trying to keep back hot puzzled tears.

There was an adieu or so waved from the *Hornet's* officers in the small boats as they sheered off the schooner's side. Monsieur Sazarac bowed. Bowed to them all with apparently the same debonair dismissal.

Mademoiselle Lestron turned to De Almonaster with a wild whisper: "He is not coming! He is not coming with us!"

For no sooner had Mademoiselle Lestron left the *Seraphine* that day in 1821, than Monsieur Sazarac turned and ran down in the emperor's cabin. He burst into the doorway of the emperor's stateroom and flung the golden trinket upon the lace and silken coverlet of the emperor's bed.

"There—robber!" he shouted, somewhat impatiently. "Her bracelet—stolen—taken against her will! Are you satisfied?"

The man on the bed looked at it quietly with glittering eyes above his hollow cheeks.

He still had his boots on, and the imperial couch was rather the worse for the mud and dried blood upon it. But now he sat up straighter and gestured with superb authority.

"Well, then! You lost her—you will never see her again!"

"I lost her. And neither you nor I will ever see her again!" He looked at the painter of the rue Royale more composedly: "Eh, Jarvis? What should you and I ask of life? Youth turns to youth always—and a fine fellow, this De Almonaster. You and I will never see her again."

"The devil take me if I ever saw her at all, very clearly. Whether her eyes are brown, or merely very dark blue—and her hair. . . . Eh, well! She never saw me very clearly either. Which is most fortunate. She will remember longest the one who was the greatest mystery. Sir—another peg o' brandy."

"Here—scum o' the seas! Your drink—plunderer o' the ports!"

"Monsieur Lafitte"—the jester crushed back against the emperor's pillows and touched a handkerchief of elegant linen to his lips delicately—"you say I shall die before morning?"

"It is certain as anything I know, Jarvis."

"Jarvis?" The jester grew quite solemn: "Wait a moment, Monsieur Lafitte." He straightened his body a bit: "Now—bring me the cutlass of old Gorgio!"

"I brought it—here," answered Monsieur Lafitte obediently.

"The pistol of Bohon!"

"By your side, there—cleaned and loaded—"

"The head scarf of Nez Coupe!"

"On the pillow by you. And see—the earring of Johanness—"

"Where the devil is the other one?" roared the Bottle Emperor testily.

"I could not get the other one unless I cut the bo'sun's left ear—"

"Name o' evil!—why don't you obey me!" He thrust out a skinny finger and shook it with a lordly wrath.

Monsieur Lafitte shrugged exculpatingly.

"Eh, well! Can't you be satisfied? You have plundered them all! You have laid a solid shot through a good ship, killed your man on a red deck—boasted, swaggered; robbed nine buccaneers in a row—and looted a jewel from a woman!"

"Not so soon. A pot o' gold, that also is essential. Fetch it at once—"

The master shrugged; then with a patient sigh, he scattered from his pockets an arc of Spanish doubloons across the silken coverlet. "There, corsair! That is all I have to be robbed of. Now, rest, Mad John."

"Another thing. The name—Sazarac—it was the name she loved."

"Perdition!" The other man turned to the bedside: "Well, then—be Sazarac. Monsieur Sazarac was also a ghost. He never dared step from the shadows to her eye, more than did you. Be comforted, old friend! Jean—of the old days—is with you. The others have gone a little time before."

"Sazarac—" murmured the other, and the old plaintive tone came again to him: "I demand that also . . . it is the name she will remember—"

"Well, then! Name o' God! Take everything from me—strip me to the hide! See—I dub you—Sazarac."

Monsieur Lafitte touched him upon his bloody-bandaged shoulder with the rusty cutlass of Gorgio, the dead Catalan. "Now, boaster—Sazarac!"

Monsieur Sazarac laid back upon the emperor's pillows. He motioned to the emperor's decanter. "A peg o' cognac, Monsieur Lafitte."

He moistened his tongue with the drink fastidiously, and rubbed his unshaven chin. A square of blue hung above him through the open skylight, and against it the snowy burst of sail. He could hear the creak of blocks and gear, the faint shout of sailormen aloft to Clark, the English lad at the wheel, as the new crew of the emperor's ship set the royals.

"See here?" exclaimed Monsieur Sazarac thoughtfully. "The flag I once painted at my studio in the rue Conti—black with the white bones? You will hoist it to-morrow when they all go over."

"Eh? Over?—Well, I understand. Monsieur, the black flag shall be at the peak."

"How many are there in the row by the fo'cas'le for me to command?"

"Nine. You will make ten, Monsieur Sazarac."

"It must be done by precedence—" ordained the other loftily. "First, I—Monsieur Sazarac—with my plunder. It is all to be

wrapped in my silk-lined cloak and tied very tightly to my belt—"

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" whispered the other; and then to himself: "Is this the fever? . . . the brandy? . . . or the secret soul of my friend?"

Monsieur Sazarac suddenly thundered to recall his lieutenant's mind.

"Silence! I was saying—in precedence! First, Monsieur Sazarac. Then, Beluche, the admiral; Johanness, the bo'sun—and then the others to the green water. I order—you will obey."

"I will obey, Monsieur Sazarac." The last adventurer turned away as if he had a petition to offer. It was hard to conceal that he desired to keep one little thing for himself out of this ravishment.

"See here—Corsair. The little bracelet which you ordered must be stolen? Is it needful that it go to the bottom of the sea with you to-morrow?"

Monsieur Sazarac fixed his bright restless eyes upon the other's somber attentive face. The flicker of a wise ruthless smile came to him.

"It is needful. It is my plunder. It was—hers. Name o' names! There can be no discussion! Pin it to my new waistcoat—do you understand?"

The last man turned away from the emperor's bedside. He took his snuff absently, and sat down with the air of one who had lost the last battle. Then he looked at the plunder of Monsieur Sazarac upon the emperor's pillow.

"Even the bracelet—" he sighed. "What a buccaneer, this Sazarac . . . and to-morrow he will be less lonely than I!"

Monsieur Sazarac, outstretched with some luxurious peace upon the silken, imperial coverlet, appeared to hear this whisper. He turned to see the other man staring out the open port at the sloop rolling in the gentle seas.

"They have reached the deck," murmured Lafitte absently. "She is in De Almonaster's arms . . . she is crying, or laughing, I can not say which, but she is waving a little hand to us—"

"To Sazarac—I will have that, too," smiled the jester. "My ragged heart has always

longed for a tear or a smile from a lady. What riches I have—at the end! Here—Monsieur Lafitte—" He lifted Mademoiselle Lestron's bracelet and tossed it to the other. "Out of the wealth of my empire and my love I give you this trinket as a keepsake from her and from myself. Sazarac must be generous to the last, eh—Jean?"

"He must fail in nothing." The adventurer lifted the bracelet to his lips and smiled in turn: "He must be as she dreamed from the first. Thank you, Monsieur Sazarac."

And the two watched the distant figures on the *Hornet*. They could not know what the girl was crying out from her lover's arms:

"Raoul! The *Seraphine* is not following us! She is sailing eastward after all. . . . Oh, Raoul, what is the mystery?"

"The seas are wide—there are many far, secret places for Monsieur Sazarac," he whispered. "Louise! Dearest—and always longed for! . . . you love me! . . . you love me!"

"I love you." She smiled out of her tears, glad for his arm, his tenderness, his under-

standing, when her eyes turned again to the black schooner with the gold line along the water. It had broken out to snowy sail; it was growing smaller, fainter, in the east, like a lily floating in the sun-wash of the gulf.

"In New Orleans you will know everything," Raoul smiled, out of his joy. "I will tell you everything—and of my love again! Look, dearest . . . Sazarac, a phantom fading into the mist!"

"Ah, but my little bracelet! In the end, perhaps I shall understand everything except why he stole my bracelet!"

Which was exactly the way things fell out.

Long years afterward Madame, the Countess de Almonaster's children—and then the children of her children—stood before a shabby little shop which was once Pierre Maspero's gaming-house, and looked across at the faded façade of the gray house which their forefather built for the exiled emperor. They went, also, of a Sunday afternoon, among the tourists, to the low tomb in the old St. Louis cemetery where the city had carved a flattering inscription from Voltaire's "Henriade" to the memory of an honest councilor:

"The Victor of a Hundred Fights on Sea and Land."

Ah, what jests may live in stone!

Madame, the countess, could relate everything to her children, except about the bracelet of Marie Antoinette. At times, from the gallery of her great house on the Esplanade in old New Orleans, Madame would look across the mighty Mississippi to the dark and flooded forests of Barataria beyond which lay the blue gulf into which Monsieur Sazarac vanished forever from the world of men.

Eh, *bien!* The adventurer might come again some day with her bracelet . . . but over Monsieur's shoulder would peer his last ragged follower whispering that a jester, too, might love!

THE END

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